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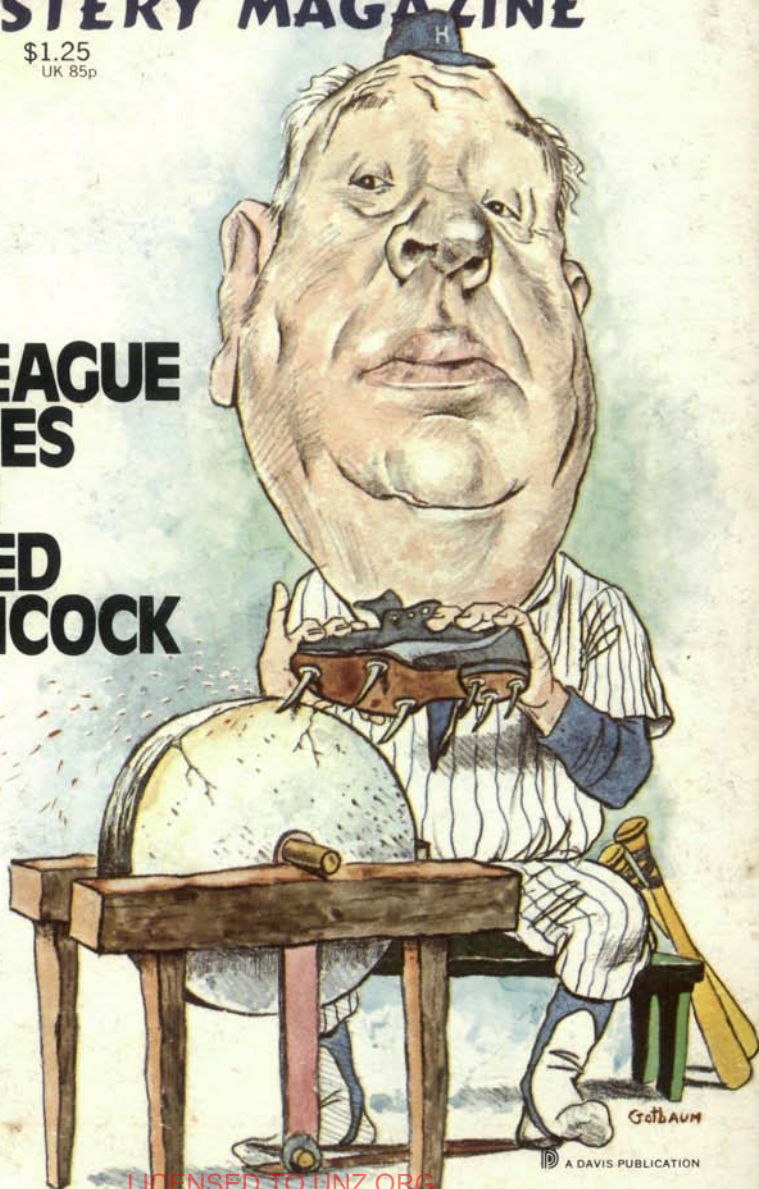
HITCHCOCK'S

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HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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June 18, 1980



Dear Reader:

Crime is bustin' out all over and we suggest that you tear your eyes away from the fabulous flora and foliage of the parks and gardens and focus them on this issue, lest, as Alexander Pope once warned, you "die of a rose in aromatic pain."

Some of your favorite authors have been busy cultivating plots for some of your favorite detectives, and in this issue we're pleased to present the latest adventure of Dr. Amos Phipps and Captain Fenley in S.S. Rafferty's tale of old New York, "The Hawk Spoils a Broth." The Honorable Constance is also back with us, this time uncovering crime at a political fund-raising event in "The Mstery of the White Elephant" by Joyce Porter. And Ernest Savage's detective Sam Train looks into the puzzle behind a child's disappearance in "One of Those Things," while Kenneth Gavrell's detective Carlos Bannon searches for meaning in a seemingly motiveless crime in "Death in the Barrio."

But you won't have to search for the solutions to these finely honed mysteries—they're all right here, in your hands.

Good reading.

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Harry Boles got his business ideas in Soledad Prison . . .

ONE OF THOSE THINGS

by **ERNEST
SAVAGE**



The room was full of saddened people, and Clem Markins, introducing me around, was properly somber-voiced. But Clem is a lawyer and his voice adapts as the situation requires.

On the drive over to the Boles's house in his car he'd told me all that was known about the death of their four-year-old son, his voice crisp and matter-of-fact. Generally I don't like lawyers—but Clem is as honest as any, I guess, and we had done business before.

"They buried him a week ago today," he had said, "and he disappeared the week before that—fourteen days ago. But you must have read about it in the papers, Sam."

I had, up to a point. Billy Boles had ridden away from his house on a tricycle at six o'clock that evening two weeks ago and had been found nine days later, face down in a ditch of tailwater near a walnut grove fifteen miles from his home. He'd been dead the whole nine days, according to the pathologist's report, but he'd not been drowned. The body had been sufficiently decomposed so that marks of violence on it—if any—were difficult to define.

But the story in the papers had been of the search for the missing boy—a fairly frequent phenomenon these days, it seems, and one that stirs the public soul as little else does, except maybe a gas crunch. The search had been long and persistent. Neighborhood groups had been organized for the hunt, boy scouts had mobilized, off-duty cops had given of their time, but the hunt had ended only when a man disking the nearby grove had paused by the ditch to have his lunch. No clue had been found either before or after the boy's discovery, and his father, Fred Boles, frantic with grief and rage, and with the cops' interest inevitably waning, had asked his lawyer, Clem, to hire the best man he could find to continue the search. I liked that—"the best man he could find"—and grinned sardonically in the car at the blithely delivered phrase, as if it weren't meant to score points. A few of which Clem owed me.

"That's you, Sam," he said unselfconsciously. "But I honestly don't know what you can do that hasn't already been done. The thing is, though, let's help Boles wind down his grief. A few days, maybe a week of your thrashing around, and he'll accept it the way it is."

"I don't work *pro forma*," I said, a little stiffly.

"Hell, Sam, I know that. Maybe you can find out what really happened—so much the better. He might even throw in a bonus for the both of us—who knows? He can afford it."

Now I was in a room full of the bereaved family. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Boles, the boy's father and mother; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Boles, Fred's brother and sister-in-law; a grandmother; a grandfather; and Billy's sister Elaine, who was seven years old and looked the most bereaved of all.

Clem had told me about them on the way over. The Boles brothers were known in the construction business as first-rate builders, specialists

in solar-powered residential and commercial structures. "Hell, Sam," Clem had said, "the house I'm taking you to must be worth two hundred thou and costs maybe fifty bucks a month to heat and cool! I mean, these guys are *good*—way ahead of the field. Harry's the engineering genius, Fred's the money man. Let's do a job with them, Sam. It won't hurt either one of us a bit."

Generally speaking, as I say, I don't like lawyers, but bereaved parents touch me as I suppose only a bachelor can be touched. We can only guess at their grief; and sometimes, I'm sure, we guess wrong.

So I sat in the living room and asked a few questions and listened to the answers. Billy was an extraordinary boy: precocious, opinionated, tough-minded. He could read and write and add numbers; he could play the piano that was over in the corner. And he could, his father said, throw a ball like a ten-year-old. The picture built, with contributions from all of them except Elaine, who remained steadily silent and grim.

"Where would he have been most apt to go?" I asked at one point. "On a tricycle you have a limited range."

"To my house," his aunt said quickly. "My house is four blocks from here."

"Three and a half," her husband Harry amended. "And you only have to cross three streets. Billy was careful at corners."

"He went there often?"

"Two or three times a week. Whenever—"

"If only I'd been there," his aunt interjected huskily.

"Whenever what?" I said, aiming the question at her. Her name was Mary.

"Whenever—" She darted a glance at her sister-in-law, Billy's mother, who finished the answer.

"Whenever he was mad at me." Tears welled in her eyes and she wiped them away with her fingers.

"He was mad at you, Mrs. Boles?"

"My husband was late," she said. "Dinner was getting cold."

"I was at the office," Fred Boles said wearily, his shoulders hunched. "Closing a deal. I couldn't get away."

"You could have called," his wife said reflexively, salting the wound and then regretting it at once as her husband grimaced with guilt. "Fred, I didn't mean—"

"I know, I know," he said, adding almost savagely, "That happens a

lot in our business, Mr. Train—I get tied up. But what matters now is who killed him. Somebody killed him and the goddamn cops—”

“Fred!”

“—and the goddamn cops are sitting on their hands!”

“That’s why Mr. Train is here, Fred,” Clem cut in suavely. “If anybody can find out who did this brutal thing, he can.”

A different voice again, unctuous and soothing. I could have clapped him on the head, but I said to the mother, “Did he always follow the same route to his aunt’s house?”

“Yes. I used to walk him over until he got his trike. And then one day he just did it by himself. He was a very self-sufficient boy, Mr. Train.”

Clem said, “The police checked his route inch by inch, but nothing.”

“Is it certain he went there?”

Uncle Harry answered. “No. The cops could find no one who saw him on the way. He could have gone anywhere.”

“But he never did, Harry,” his brother said. “He *never* went anyplace else.”

There was a brief silence, after which Aunt Mary said again, “If only I’d been there.”

I looked at her. “Was no one there, Mrs. Boles?”

“No. Harry—” Her eyes fluttered shut and her mouth closed.

“I was at a bar,” Harry said aggressively. “Sometimes I stop at a bar on the way home. There’s no law against it, for chrissakes!” He had lit a cigar and now leaned back behind a cloud of smoke. His wife had done a masterful job of putting him down with a word and a look and I approved of his anger. But he had a boozier’s face—formerly handsome, now puffed and jowly. I stared at him a moment, in sympathy and interest, as the conversation resumed.

There was a lot more, but nothing new—the dogged rehash of an inconsolable loss—and at nine-thirty I looked at my watch, said it was getting late, and stood up. Clem—who was probably working this gig by the hour, as most lawyers do—followed me with some reluctance. But there was nothing further to be learned here. Possibly nothing further to be learned anywhere.

Outside, by the passenger door of Clem’s ritzy car, Elaine was waiting for me, with a doll I hadn’t noticed before clutched tightly against her chest. She should have been in bed, but the Boles family was no doubt way off its rhythm these days.

"Hi," I said.

"Father was supposed to play ball with Billy that night," she said without preamble. "That's why Billy was mad. He always promised to play ball with Billy but he almost never did."

The cold bitterness of her voice needed countering. I bent down and said quickly, "Sometimes daddies can't get away from their jobs, Elaine."

"He should have been here," she said, unmollified. "That's why Billy's dead. Father killed him."

The case for her was solved, and in that moment I determined to unsolve it, to find a different culprit. She couldn't carry the burden of that conviction on her young back without something breaking.

"God," Clem said softly, and I said, "Yeah," as Elaine, her spine as stiff as Savonarola's, walked back to the house clutching her doll.

On our way back to San Francisco, halfway across the Golden Gate Bridge, I said, "I know Harry Boles. I arrested him once."

The car, under Clem's hand, swerved a yard out of line. "You're kidding!"

"No, I'm not. You arrest a man with a gun in his hand and something about his face burns into your brain."

"My God! When? For what?"

"Twenty-two or -three years ago. I was a beat cop then. Harry was holding up a liquor store. I walked in on him. It was a toy gun, but it looked real as death. I damn near shot him, but he put his hands in the air and smiled at me. You don't forget that either."

"And then what?" Clem said.

"Arrest, trial, conviction, jail. I think he got three to five. The toy gun saved him another five years."

"Do you think he remembered you?"

"You can bet on it. He tried to keep a cloud of smoke in front of his face most of the time we were there. He's changed and I've changed—but he remembers, and so do I."

"Wow," Markins said softly, and you could hear the wheels turn in his head, sorting out what this might mean to him in fees won or lost. "Do you think," he said finally, "it has anything to do with the kid? I mean—"

"No—he was genuinely fond of the boy, that's obvious. They all were. It's just a thing you run into once in a while after you've been a cop for nineteen years."

"Listen," Clem said, instinctively organizing a defense, "the man's a genius, Sam. I mean, ninety percent of what those two guys are doing comes out of his head. You should see *his* house if you think Fred's was something."

"I will."

"He's putting in this pool that's not only self-heating, but it'll heat the cabanas and a workshop and a hothouse alongside. The man holds a dozen different patents. He's a national asset, Sam."

"So's a guy who walks to work," I said.

The next morning I got a copy of the pathologist's report and a rundown on what the police had turned up from my friend and former prowl-car partner Bill Grady, who works out of the Folsom Street Station and has access to police reports from all over the state. But I didn't learn much that was new, or anything that was important. The cause of the boy's death could be expressed only in negative or vague terms—what it wasn't or what it might have been, not what it was. He hadn't been drowned, shot, or beaten to death; he hadn't been poisoned or struck by a car. He *could* have been strangled, he *could* have been suffocated; he possibly could have been scared to death. And there were no suspects, no witnesses, no theories. Only two things were known for sure: he hadn't gone fifteen miles all by himself on the trike; and the trike had not been found.

It wasn't much to work with.

I drove north across the bridge again, through Sausalito, San Raphael, and Novato, and then another ten miles to where Billy's body had been found. Where he had ended I would start—but only for want of a better idea. It was old ground and, if there was a trail there to be found, it was too obscure for me to see. The ditch was now nearly dry, the adjacent grove between irrigations, and no murky tailwater gathered there. A smell lingered in the air, but it was the smell of drying mud, not of death.

I drove back to Novato and parked across a busy street from the Boles Brothers offices and yard. It was new, big, and prosperous-looking, the yard full of crated and tarp-covered materials and surrounded by a high barbed-wire-topped fence. I'd had it in mind to go in and talk to the dead boy's father again, but the impulse was too weak to act upon. He knew nothing but his grief.

A quarter of a block away was a coffee shop and I got out and went there and ate lunch. The vision of Elaine Boles retreating toward the

house last night sharpened in my mind. Her back had been rigid with a dangerous conviction that could become—if it hadn't already—a crippling obsession. It had had fifteen days now to get its roots down.

Mrs. Boles met me at the front door and let me in. I had two good reasons for being there, I told myself: first, to tell her what Elaine had said to me, on the outside chance she didn't already know; and, second, to walk from here to Harry Boles's house, to try to pick up the trail from its start.

She said at once, "You've found something out!"

"No, Mrs. Boles—not today, anyway. But I did last night, and I want to make sure you know about it. Your daughter blames your husband for Billy's death. She told me last night that he killed Billy, and I'm quoting her exactly."

She hadn't known, and it shocked her. "But that's ridiculous! Just because he was late? He's often late, Mr. Train."

"I understand that, but Elaine has made a quantum leap from effect to cause. Kids often do. Kids have lines of logic we sometimes can't follow. I thought you ought to know—it should be worked out of her system while it still can be."

"She's been so silent," Mrs. Boles said, her fingers to her mouth. "She's scarcely said a word since Billy died. I thought it was shock, grief." She paused, abstracted; then she made her own quantum leap and said fervently, "This means you've *got* to find out who did it, Mr. Train, you've got to find out what happened!" Her grip was as strong as a man's on my arm.

"I'm going to try," I said, "but it can't hinge on that, Mrs. Boles. We—you may never know what happened, but you can't let that destroy Elaine. Work with her, work it out of her. If you need help, get it—but don't let it grow any stronger."

There was more talk and fresh tears, but she'd gotten the message and I was thinking it was the best I could do for her, for them, the best I could ever do. The police hadn't been sitting on their hands, as Boles had asserted; they'd been working it and working it hard. Most cops have kids of their own and hate a child killer the way they hate cancer. No, they'd worked it, and maybe there was no longer a stone left to turn.

She told me how to get to Harry's house and I got in my Dart, parked it a few houses away, and walked the rest of the three and a half blocks,

finding nothing and sensing nothing in that neighborhood of expensive homes and gracefully curving streets. It was almost alien territory to a city man, its messages, if any, not the kind I hear.

There was no one home at Harry and Mary Boles's house and I stepped back onto the wide stretch of new front lawn and admired the place. Solar collectors were artfully blended into the high-sloping, south-facing expanse of roof, solar power made neat and tidy, almost an aesthetic plus, and I congratulated Harry Boles, ex-con, on a dream come true. It was the kind of place a con would dream up in his six-by-ten cell.

Fresh concrete stains ran up the length of the asphalt drive that bordered the left side of the property and I followed them up a gentle slope to a half acre of red-earth backyard where a big pool was curing in the sun, the finish coat and deck-work not yet done, an array of bare studs outlining the cabanas-to-be that Clem had spoken of. The place was altogether a dusty mess, three-quarters on the way toward another con's dream—his own private playground, fit for a king. I was impressed. Few of them make it this big.

The three-car garage facing me was empty, the adjacent cabana area cluttered with building material yet to be used. I prowled through it, reading the signs—there would be a series of showers, a john, a wet bar, the plumbing for all that capped and ready; an old refrigerator, door off and stacked to one side, waiting to cool the booze that Harry still loved. When I arrested him those many years ago he'd had a toy gun in one hand and a sack of bourbon in the other.

Had Billy come here fifteen days ago at the twilight hour and found no one home, Aunt Mary not there to soothe the ruffled young ego? How angry had he been that night, how disappointed that no one was here? We would never know that now, but we might learn, with luck and tenacity, what he'd done then, where he'd gone, who had seen him, accosted him, killed him, hauled him fifteen miles away. I looked around again, all cop now, alert for anything untoward, recording things the untrained eye doesn't see and things the trained eye stores unconsciously for later use. Had the tricycle been equipped with a bell? I hadn't asked that, but I looked for one now, even part of one. The trike had been painted fire-engine red—I *had* asked that—so I began looking for traces of that too.

He came up the drive in his purring Mercedes and parked in the left-hand space in the garage. He'd seen me and waved. Now he crossed the

tarmac in front of the garage, a hand raised to take mine, which I offered at once.

"Train," he said somberly, no joy in his eye or voice. "I expected you'd be here. I saw you across the street from the office going up to Dixie's Place. I figured you'd go to Fred's and then come here."

"I've got noplacel else to go," I said. "There's no trail, no clue."

"Come on in the house—I'll buy you a drink."

I followed him under a roofed patio, through a door with a lovely leaded-glass window, down a hall, and into a den with a bar big enough to do business. Another con's wish fulfilled.

"The wife went over to Sacramento to stay with her sister for a few days," he said, pouring drinks. "The pressure was getting to her."

"It's tough to lose a youngster."

"The toughest thing there is. I'm glad I don't have any of my own—and so are they, probably." He laughed mordantly, and then said, "You recognized me right away, didn't you?"

"Not right away, Harry. You've changed. But you knew me."

"The minute I saw your face and heard your name. I could hardly shake your hand. Not out of any lingering animosity, but out of sheer bloody surprise. You could have blown me away in that liquor store, and a more nervous cop would have. I owe you that." He smiled suddenly. "So you're private now."

"I have been for five or six years." I looked around. "And you're—a success."

"I've made money." He shrugged as though it didn't mean a great deal, and maybe it didn't. He'd always been an interesting man to me. "I got most of my ideas at Soledad," he said. "Sitting out in the yard there you take a lot of sun and you've got time to think. I guess I owe you that too." He drained a large slug of Scotch. "You've got that look in your eye, Sam, like everybody else. You're telling me I drink too much—redundant information. I know I do. I always have and always will, probably. What I wanted in that liquor store was booze as much as money."

"It was tough, then, in stir."

"Three years dry—a lifetime. But good for the liver and the brain." Then he drank again, as though the liver and brain were on the block, their work done. There was tension in him, lots of it, his eyes dense and yellowed with abuse and strain.

"Your wife," I said, to change tacks, "where was she that night that she wasn't here?"

"She was at a movie that afternoon with a friend, and then they stopped at some damn dress shop afterward. She's got ninety-two dresses upstairs but she had to have another. She was two hours in the joint. Clothes are her only passion, Sam, and I do mean only." He'd made another drink and drained half of it off. "But I'll say this for her—she's usually here at six o'clock. Nineteen nights out of twenty she's here."

"So she blames herself."

"Yes, and it's killing her."

"And who do you blame, Harry?"

"Not who—what. Bad luck, bad timing, all the way around."

"You don't blame yourself?"

He thought about it, frowning. "All right, partly, I guess. I don't usually stop for a drink on my way home—maybe once a week. I do most of my boozing right here where I'm standing. But that's what I mean by luck—it was all bad that night."

"And Billy's mother blames herself for being short-tempered with him and leaving the driveway gates open so Fred wouldn't have to get out of his car. And Fred blames that deal he was closing. Do you know who Elaine blames?"

"No, who?"

"Her father."

"Fred? How come?"

"She has her reasons. She intercepted me last night at Clem's car. She said her father had promised to come home and play ball with Billy that night. She said flatly that he killed Billy. She's convinced of it, Harry, and we've got to unconvince her, pinpoint the real blame, or at least feather it out." He was silent so long I said pointedly, "You follow?"

"I follow. But how? God, it was everybody's fault."

"No. Somebody took his body fifteen miles from here and dumped it in a ditch. It was that person's fault, Harry."

He absorbed that in more silence, slumping a little against the bar. On the wall behind him was a large oil painting of a desert scene, presumably there to stimulate thirst. In the foreground of the picture the undulating sands were red under a setting sun, the color of Harry's backyard. He was making himself another drink, his third, when I got up from my stool without a word and went back outside and stood by the

edge of the pool, staring into its deep end, sorting things out, being a cop again. The tricycle would have to be in there somewhere under that fairly fresh rough-coat of concrete.

Back inside Harry had made me a fresh drink, and I sat down in front of it. "When was the concrete work done on the pool?" I asked.

"I don't know—last week sometime. I use the crew when they're between jobs. Why?"

"When was the pool itself excavated, Harry?"

"Hell, I don't know—three weeks ago maybe."

"You've got records of the work?"

"Of course. In the office. Why?"

"I've got to pinpoint it, Harry. I've got to tell Elaine who did it so she won't blame her father any more."

"But the kid's crazy, Sam. Fred didn't do anything but work a little late that night. She's—"

"And so did you, Harry. So did you."

"Ah, come on—whaddaya mean?" His speech was slurring a little. But his eyes were still not drunk and the look of innocence in them was firm.

"What time *did* your wife get home that night, Harry? Or was she here when you got back from the grove?"

"She was here. What are you—"

"And what time did *you* get here—I mean, get *back* here?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"That walnut grove, Harry. Did you and Fred ever look at it with the idea of buying? I mean, why there instead of any one of a million other places? I'll bet somewhere in your recent office records that grove'll appear—or in the records of some agent who tried to sell it to you. I mean, Harry, when you're panicky and short on time, you go to a known place, not just some random spot. You'd seen that ditch full of water sometime before." I'd been reciting all this to the desert scene behind him; now I looked at his eyes. "Right? Human nature, Harry."

"Sam—"

"What happened, Harry?"

"Sam—"

"What time did you really get home that evening?" I paused, my eyes steadily on his. "Billy left home around six o'clock. Figure maybe ten minutes for him to get here—and then the question is, when did he shut himself in the refrigerator? Right away, or sometime later? Let's say right

away, because nobody was here and he was mad at the world and wanted to shut it out—say, six-twenty or so. And what time did you get home, Harry? I mean the first time?”

“About quarter to seven.” He was beginning to crumble. His eyes wavered away from mine.

“And Mary wasn’t here—which was unusual—so you went out back looking for her. You saw Billy’s trike alongside the fridge, and with your good quick mind you figured he was inside. What time was that?”

He drank copiously and sighed. “A little before seven,” he said. “He was dead, Sam.”

“You’re sure of that?”

“I’m sure. I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life. But I tried mouth-to-mouth on him for ten minutes before I thought of anything else, and then—” He paused.

“Then what? What did you think about then, Harry?”

“My life. He was gone—and he was taking what’s left of mine with him. You may not understand that, but that’s the way it was.”

“I think I do.”

“I’m the maverick in the family—the ex-con, the boozier, the kid brother you’ve got to keep your eye on.”

“I think I understand that too,” I said.

“Yeah, maybe—maybe not.” He seemed almost sober now, trying to keep the bitterness from his voice. “Probably not—nobody can. I’m still carrying the ghosts, still trailed by the shadows. Fred would have killed me if he’d known his son—his beloved and only son—had died in my refrigerator. Harry the boozier. Oh, sure, I know I should have taken the door off it long ago, the way you’re supposed to, but I didn’t.”

“Until later.”

“Until right then! I damn near tore it off—right then, with the poor kid lying by its side! It was probably a dumb thing to do, but I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“And then you buried his tricycle in the hole for the pool.”

“No. First I put his body in the trunk of the car. *Then* I buried the trike. And then I took off for the walnut grove—and you’re right, I *had* seen it before. But Fred didn’t know that. Nobody did.”

“Meantime, nobody had come around yet. You must have just missed the beginning of the search.”

“That’s right. By a minute or two, and by the grace of God. And I

really mean that, Sam, *by the grace of God!* I wasn't supposed to be caught in that trap—*He* didn't want me to be."

"Maybe. But now Elaine has been."

"Aw, come on, that can't be real!"

"But it is. I saw her—I talked to her."

He shoved his drink aside and tried to light a cigar, but put it aside as well. No small prop would help him now, and he saw little hope in my eyes. We stared at each other for a few beats before I said, without pleasure, "Harry, if I were still a cop I'd have to take you in right now."

"But you're not a cop now, Sam. You're for hire."

He'd put a little extra meaning in those last three words and I said quickly, "I can't be bought, Harry. Not even with your money."

"I didn't mean it that way. But money or no money, you don't have enough evidence to take me in. It's not like the last time."

"Yes, I do, Harry. The trunk of your car will have identifiable bits of evidence that Billy was there—but, aside from that, the refrigerator tells the story."

"How?"

"It doesn't have any red dust in it. It's clean inside. Everything else out there is covered with red dust from when they dug the pool hole three weeks ago. But the refrigerator had its door on then, so it's clean. And the trike—we could tear up the pool and find it. No, Harry. If I were still a cop you'd have had it. I wouldn't have a choice."

"But you do now."

"A choice between you and Elaine. If I turn you in, her obsession dies."

"*It's not that simple!*" His voice had gained strength; he was fighting back. "You turn me in," he said, "and Fred dies—he couldn't handle it. And Mary dies, and *I* die—not that that makes a damn bit of difference, but I'm tellin' you, Sam, it's not that simple! You've got the same problem I had when I found his body—what to do about it. What in hell to do about it!"

A licensed private investigator in this state is obliged to report any felonies he discovers, and there'd been several committed here. But I didn't say that to Harry Boles. I think he knew it. And he'd put his finger on my dilemma, which had been precisely his sixteen days ago: how to limit the damage caused by a tragedy that seemed destined to happen; and that was no one's fault—or that was everyone's. His father, his

mother, his aunt, his uncle—all of them had contributed to the circumstances that had killed Billy Boles.

I drank some of the iceless Scotch in my glass and felt the lure of more. It would be easy to forget it, get drunk—maybe with Harry, who knew the places to go—but that wouldn't work for me any better than it was working for him. He had to live with it, however it turned out; and now, so did I. It was a question and I put it to him.

"Can you handle it, Harry? Can you live with it?"

"I have. I am."

"But what about Elaine? Can she?"

"I love her, Sam. I loved them both." He was fighting tears now. "They were the only kids in my life. If I can help her—I'll do *anything*."

"Would you turn yourself in?"

"If I thought it would do any good." His fist came down on the bar. "But it wouldn't! She's gonna have to work her own way out of it, like the rest of us."

"Would you help her do that?"

"In any way I can."

"What she'll need is family—you, I think, particularly—a good and loving uncle she can trust, who can reassure her about her father. We'll all—" I had been about to include myself in, but in that instant my decision arrived—and welcome: I would do nothing. I'd walk away from it.

I would tell her father tonight that there was nothing further to learn, that the trail had grown too cold.

I stood up, relieved, and started for the front door. My car was three blocks away. Harry followed, let me out, took me down the front walk until I turned. He'd gotten control of his face again, traces of the old good looks still there. It had been easy to like him twenty-two years ago; it was easier now. He put out his hand and I saw no reason not to take it.

"It helps that you know," he said, and turned and went back to his brand-new prison.

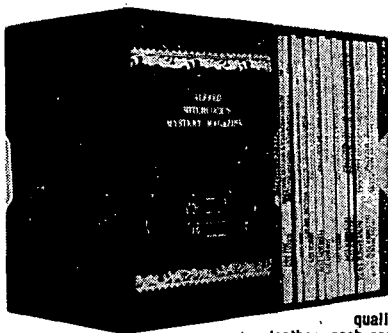
I had told myself I was through with the case, but I wasn't; you never are. Elaine was just a new one on my mind to worry about, to wonder about, and to pray about if you're a praying man. I have a dozen others collected through the years, all young and all damaged. We adults blunder and make our mistakes, and it's often children who pay. But if there is

any one duty laid on us more than another it's to keep the price within their means.

I know where Elaine goes to school and now and then I check on her at the end of the school day. The first time I did she walked home alone, her back still stiff, her eyes straight ahead. Yesterday when I went by she was with a group, playing; horsing around the way kids do—the healthy ones, anyway.

And I talked to Harry last night. He said she seems fine now, out of the obsession. She comes over on warm afternoons and he's teaching her how to swim. She's having fun again.

And Harry himself? He still drinks and he always will. It's his way, he says, of entertaining the ghosts.



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Her mother had always told her that men were beasts . . .



DOMESTIC INTRIGUE

by

**DONALD E.
WESTLAKE**



"Mrs. Carroll," said the nasty man, "I happen to know that your husband is insanely jealous."

I happened to know the same thing myself, and so there was nothing to do but agree. Robert *was* insanely jealous. "However," I added, "I fail to see where that is any of your business."

The nasty man smiled at me, nastily. "I'll come to that," he said.

"You entered this house," I reminded him, "under the guise of taking

some sort of survey. Yet you ask me no questions at all about my television viewing habits. On the contrary, you promptly begin to make comments about my personal life. I think it more than likely that you are a fraud."

"Ah, madam," he said, with that nasty smile of his, under that nasty little moustache, "of course I'm a fraud. Aren't we all frauds, each in his—or *her*—own way?"

"I think," I said, as icily as possible, "it would be best if you were to leave. At once."

He made no move to get up from the sofa. In fact, he even spread out a bit more, acting as though at any instant he might kick off his shoes and take a nap. "If your husband," he said lazily, "were to discover another man making love to you, there's no doubt in my mind that Mr. Carroll would shoot the other man on the spot."

Once again I had no choice but to agree, since Robert had more than once said the same thing to me, waving that great big pistol of his around and shouting, "If I ever see another man so much as *kiss* you, I'll blow his brains out, I swear I will!"

Still, that was my cross to bear, and hardly a subject for idle chatter with perfect strangers who had sailed into my living room under false colors, and I said as much. "I don't know where you got your information," I went on, "and I don't care. Nor do I care to discuss my private life with you. If you do not leave, I shall telephone the police at once."

The nasty man smiled his nasty smile and said, "I don't think you'll call the police, Mrs. Carroll. You aren't a stupid woman. I think you realize by now I'm here for a reason, and I think you'd like to know what that reason is. Am I right?"

He was right to an extent, to the extent that I had the uneasy feeling he knew even more about my private life than he'd already mentioned, possibly even more than Robert knew, but I was hardly anxious to hear him say the words that would confirm my suspicions, so I told him, "I find it unlikely that you could have anything to say to me that would interest me in the slightest."

"I haven't bored you so far," he said, with a sudden crispness in his tone, and I saw that the indolent way he had of lounging on my sofa was pure pretense, that underneath he was sharp and hard and very self-aware. But this glimpse of his interior was as brief as it was startling; he slouched at once back into that infuriating pose of idleness and said, "Your

husband carries that revolver of his everywhere, doesn't he? A Colt Cobra, isn't it? Thirty-eight caliber. Quite a fierce little gun."

"My husband is in the jewelry business," I said. "He very frequently carries on his person valuable gems or large amounts of money. He has a permit for the gun, because of the business he's in."

"Yes, indeed, I know all that." He looked around admiringly and said, "And he does very well at it too, doesn't he?"

"You *are* beginning to bore me," I said. I half turned away, saying, "I believe I'll call the police now."

Quietly, the nasty man said, "Poor William."

I stopped. I turned around. I said, "What was that?"

"No longer bored?" Under the miserable moustache, he smiled once again his nasty smile.

I said, "Explain yourself!"

"You mean why did I say, 'Poor William'? I was merely thinking about what would happen to William if a Colt Cobra were pointed at him, and the trigger pulled, and a thirty-eight-caliber special bullet were to smash its way through his body."

I suddenly felt faint. I took three steps to the left, and rested my hands on the back of a chair. "What's his last name?" I demanded, though the demand was somewhat nullified by the tremor in my voice. "William who?"

He looked at me, and again he gave me a glimpse of the steel within. He said, "Shall I really say the name, Mrs. Carroll? Is there more than one William in your life?"

"There are no Williams in my life," I said, but despairingly, knowing now that this nasty man knew everything. But how? How?

"Then I must say the name," he said. "William Bar—"

"Stop!"

He smiled. His teeth were very even and very white and very sparkly. I hated them. He said, softly, "Won't you sit down, Mrs. Carroll? You seem a bit pale."

I moved around the chair I'd been holding for support, and settled into it, rather heavily and gracelessly. I said, "I don't know when my husband will be home, he could be—"

"I do," he said briskly. "Not before one-fifteen. He has appointments till one, and it's at least a fifteen-minute drive here from his last appointment." He flickered back to indolence, saying lazily, "I come well pre-

pared, you see, Mrs. Carroll."

"So I see."

"You are beginning," he said, "to wonder what on earth it is that I want. I seem to know so very much about you, and so far I have shown no interest in doing anything but talk. Isn't that odd?"

From the alert and mocking expression on his face, I knew he required an answer of me, and so I said, "I suppose you can do what you want. It's your party."

"So it is. Mrs. Carroll, would you like to see your good friend William dead? Murdered? Shot down in cold blood?"

My own blood ran cold at the thought of it. William! My love! In all this bleak and brutal world, only one touch of tenderness, of beauty, of hope do I see, and that is William. If it weren't for those stolen moments with William, how could I go on another minute with Robert?

If only it were William who was rich, rather than Robert. But William was poor, pitifully poor, and as he was a poet it was unlikely he would ever be anything but poor. And as for me, I admit that I was spoiled, that the thought of giving up the comforts and luxuries which Robert's money could bring me made me blanch just as much as the thought of giving up William. I needed them both in equal urgency, William's love and Robert's money.

The nasty man, having waited in vain for me to answer his rhetorical question, at last said, "I can see you would not like it. William is important to you."

"Yes," I said, or whispered, unable to keep from confessing it. "Oh, yes, he is."

Until William, I had thought that all men were beasts. My mother—bless her soul—had said constantly that all men were beasts, all through my adolescence, after my father disappeared, and I had come to maturity firmly believing that she was right. I had married Robert even though I'd known he was a beast, but simply because I had believed there was no choice in the matter, that one married a beast or one didn't marry at all. And Robert did have the advantage of being rich.

But now I had found William, and I had found true love, and I had learned what my mother never knew; that not *all* men are beasts. Almost all, yes, but not entirely all. Here and there one can find the beautiful exception. Like William.

But not, obviously, like this nasty man in front of me. I would have

needed none of my mother's training to know that *this* man was a beast. Perhaps, in his own cunning way, an even worse beast than brutal and blustering Robert. Perhaps, in his own way, even more dangerous.

I said, "What is it you want from me?"

"Oh, my dear lady," he protested, "I want from *you*? Not a thing, I assure you. It is what *you* want from *me*."

I stared at him. I said, "I don't understand. What could I possibly want from you?"

As quickly as a striking snake, his hand slid within his jacket, slid out again with a long blank white envelope, and flipped it through the air to land in my lap. "These," he said. "Take a look at them."

I opened the envelope. I took out the pictures. I looked at them, and I began to feel my face go flaming red.

I recognized the room in the pictures, remembered that motel.

The faces were clear in every one of the photographs.

"What you'll want," said the nasty man, smiling triumphantly, "is the negatives."

I whispered, "You mean, you'll show these to my husband?"

"Oh, I would much rather not. Wouldn't you like to have them for yourself? The prints *and* the negatives?"

"How much?"

"Well, I really hadn't thought," he said, smiling and smiling. "I'd rather leave that up to you. How much would you say they were worth to *you*, Mrs. Carroll?"

I looked at the photos again, and something seemed to go click in my mind. I said, "I believe I'm going to faint." Then my eyes closed, and I fell off the chair onto the floor.

He had a great deal of difficulty awaking me, patting my cheeks and chafing my hands, and when at last I opened my eyes I saw that he was no longer smiling, but was looking very worried. "Mrs. Carroll," he said. "Are you all right?"

"My heart," I whispered. "I have a weak heart." It was untrue, but it seemed a lie that might prove useful.

It did already. He looked more worried than ever, and backed away from me, looking down at me lying on the floor and saying, "Don't excite yourself, Mrs. Carroll. Don't get yourself all upset. We can work this out."

"Not now," I whispered. "Please." I passed a hand across my eyes.

"I must rest. Call me. Telephone me. I'll meet you somewhere."

"Yes, of course. Of course."

"Call me this evening. At six."

"Yes."

"Say your name is Boris."

"Boris," he repeated. "Yes, I will." Hastily he retrieved the fallen photos: "Call at six," he said, and dashed out of the house.

I got to my feet, brushed off my treads, and went to phone William.

"Darling," I said.

"Darling!" he cried.

"My love."

"Oh, my heart, my sweet, my rapture!"

"Darling, I must—"

"Darling! Darling! Darling!"

"Yes, sweetheart, thank you, that's all very—"

"My life, my love, my all!"

"William!"

There was a stunned silence, and then his voice said, faintly, "Yes, Mona?"

There were advantages to having a poet for a lover, but there were also disadvantages, such as a certain difficulty in attracting his attention sometimes.

But I had his attention now. I said, "William, I won't be able to see you tonight."

"Oh, sweetheart!"

"I'm sorry, William, believe me I am, but something just came up."

"Is it—" his voice lowered to a whisper "—is it *him*?"

He meant Robert. I said, "No, dear, not exactly. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow."

"Shall I see you tomorrow?"

"Of course. At the Museum. At noon."

"Ah, my love, the hours shall have broken wings."

"Yes, dear."

With some difficulty I managed to end the conversation. I then took the other car, the Thunderbird, and drove to the shopping center. In the drugstore there I purchased a large and foul-looking cigar, and in the Mister-Master Men's-Wear Shoppe I bought a rather loud and crude necktie. I returned to the house, lit the cigar, and found that it tasted

even worse than I had anticipated. Still, it was all in a good cause. I went upstairs, puffing away at the cigar, and draped the necktie over the doorknob of the closet door in my bedroom. I then went back to the first floor, left a conspicuous grey cone of cigar ash in the ashtray beside Robert's favorite chair, puffed away until the room was full of cigar smoke and I felt my flesh beginning to turn green, and then tottered out to the kitchen. I doused the cigar under the cold water at the kitchen sink, stuffed it down out of sight in the rubbish bag, and went away to take two Alka Seltzer and lie down.

By one-fifteen, when Robert came bounding home, I was recovered and was in the kitchen thawing lunch. "*My love!*" roared Robert, and crushed me in his arms.

That was the difference right there. William would have put the accent on the other word.

I suffered his attentions, as I always did, and then he went away to read the morning paper in the living room while I finished preparing lunch.

When he came to the table he seemed somewhat more subdued than usual. He ate lunch in silence, with the exception of one question, asked with an apparent attempt at casualness:

"Umm, darling, did you have any visitors today?"

I dropped my spoon into my soup. "Oh! Wasn't that clumsy! What did you say, dear?"

His eyes narrowed. "I asked you, did you have any visitors today?"

"Visitors? Why—why, no, dear." I gave a guilty sort of little laugh. "What makes you ask, sweetheart?"

"Nothing," he said, and ate his soup.

After lunch he said, "I have time for a nap today. Wake me at three, will you?"

"Of course, dear."

I woke him at three. He said he'd be home by five-thirty, and left. I checked, and the crude necktie was no longer hanging on the doorknob in my bedroom.

When Robert came home at five-thirty he was even quieter than before. I caught him watching me several times, and each time I gave a nervous start and a guilty little laugh and went into some other room.

I was in the kitchen at six o'clock, when the phone rang. "I'll get it dear!" I shouted. "It's all right, dear! I'll get it! I'll get it!"

I picked up the phone and said hello and the nasty man's voice said, "This is Boris."

"Yes, of course," I said, keeping my voice low.

"Can we talk?"

"Yes."

"Isn't your husband home?"

"It's all right, he's in the living room, he can't hear me. I want to meet you tonight, to *discuss* things." I gave a heavy emphasis to that word, and put just a touch of throatiness into my voice.

He gave his nasty laugh and said, "Whenever you say, dear lady. I take it you're recovered from this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes. It was just—tremors. But listen, here's how we'll meet. You take a room at the Flyaway Motel, under the name of Clark. I'll—"

"Take a room?"

"We'll have a lot to—*talk* about. Don't worry, I'll pay for the room."

"Well," he said, "in that case . . ."

"I'll try to be there," I said, "as soon after nine as possible. Wait for me."

"All right, M—"

"I must hang up," I said hastily, before he could call me Mrs. Carroll. I broke the connection, went into the living room, and found Robert standing near the extension phone in there. I said, "Dinner will be ready soon, dear."

"Any time, darling," he said. His voice seemed somewhat strangled. He seemed to be under something of a strain.

Dinner was a silent affair, though I tried to make small talk without much success. Afterward, Robert sat in the living room and read the evening paper.

I walked into the living room at five minutes to nine, wearing my suede jacket. "I have to go out for a while, dear," I said.

He seemed to control himself with difficulty. "Where to, dear?" he asked me.

"The drugstore. I need nail-polish remover."

"Oh, yes," he said.

I went out and got into the Thunderbird. As I drove away I saw the lights go on in my bedroom. If it was nail-polish remover Robert was looking for, he'd have little trouble finding it. There was a nearly full bottle with my other cosmetics on the vanity table.

I drove at moderate speeds, arriving at the Flyaway Motel at ten minutes past nine. "I'm Mrs. Clark," I told the man at the desk. "Could you tell me which unit my husband is in?"

"Yes, ma'am." He checked his register and said, "Six."

"Thank you."

Walking across the gravel toward unit 6, I thought it all out again, as it had come to me in a flash of inspiration this afternoon just before I had had my "faint." The idea that I could have Robert's money without necessarily having to have Robert along with it had never occurred to me before. But now it had, and I liked it. To have Robert's money without having Robert meant I could have William!

What a combination! William *and* Robert's money!

My step was light as I approached unit 6.

The nasty man opened the door to my knock. He seemed somewhat nervous. "Come on in, Mrs. Carroll."

As I went in, I glanced back and saw an automobile just turning into the motel driveway. Was that a Lincoln? A *blue* Lincoln?

The nasty man shut and locked the door, but I said, "None of that. Unlock that door."

"Don't worry about me, lady," he said, grinning nastily. "All I want from you is your money." Nevertheless, he unlocked the door again.

"Fine," I said. I took off my suede jacket.

"Now," he said, coming across the room, rubbing his hands together, "to get to business."

"Of course," I said. I took off my blouse.

He blinked at me. He said, "Hey! What are you doing?"

"Don't worry about a thing," I told him, and unzipped my toreadors.

His eyes widened and he waved his hands at me, shouting, "Don't *do* that! You got it all wrong, don't *do* that!"

"I don't believe I have it wrong," I said, and stepped out of the toreadors.

With utter panic and bewilderment, the nasty man said, "But William said you'd—" And stopped.

We both stopped. I stared at the nasty man in sudden comprehension. All at once I understood how it was he had known so much about me, how it had been possible for him to take those pictures.

So William couldn't live on the amount I gave him willingly.

Mother was right, all men *are* beasts.

As I stood there, trying to get used to this new realization, the door burst open and Robert came bellowing in, waving that huge and ugly pistol of his.

I still wasn't recovered from my shock. To think, to think I'd been trying to save William from being killed, to think I'd been willing to sacrifice both Robert and the nasty man for William's sake! And all the time, all the time, William had betrayed me!

But then I *did* recover from the shock, and fast, because I saw that Robert had stopped his enraged bellowing and was glaring at me. At *me*. And pointing that filthy pistol at me.

At *me*.

"Not me!" I cried, and pointed at the nasty man. "Him! Him!"

The first shot buzzed past my ear and smashed the glass over the woodland painting above the bed.

I ran left, I ran right. The nasty man cowered behind the dresser. Robert's second shot chunked into the wall behind me.

"You lied!" I screamed. "You *lied*!"

All men are bea

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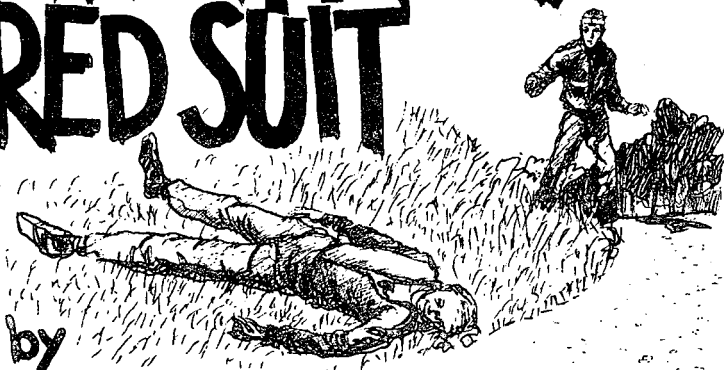
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Jogging can be hazardous to one's health . . .

THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT



by
STEPHEN WASYLYK

I folded my arms across my chest and leaned against a tree in the grey light of the spring dawn, the perspiration on my face drying in the crisp air as I watched the knot of people at the foot of the slight slope below the park path.

There were five—four men and a woman—ringed around the body of the man on the ground, and even from a distance I could see the dark blood staining the chest of his bright-red exercise jacket. Three of the

men wore police uniforms; the woman and one man did not.

One of the uniformed men said something to the woman and she glanced up at me. She was tall and slim, with dark wavy hair cut short. She wore a white blouse with a black jacket and slacks and appeared a little too elegant, especially at seven-thirty in the morning, to be standing over a dead body discussing how it got there.

She motioned to the man in the business suit and they climbed the slope toward me. The man was short and broad with straight black hair.

Two men carrying a stretcher appeared and headed for the body.

She stopped before me, an attractive woman with a face composed of smooth, slightly convex planes, the jaw perhaps a trifle too square but lending a feeling of strength.

"My name is Jennifer Locke," she said pleasantly. "This is Detective Carconi. I understand you discovered the body, Mr. Hollis."

Her eyes were steady and blue and on a level with mine and I had the feeling it would be difficult to lie to her.

"Against all the dead foliage, that bright-red suit was hard to miss. I went down to look at him, felt for a pulse, found none, saw the stain on his jacket, and ran back to the road to the phone booth to call the police. Which I assume you're part of."

Her lips twitched. "I'm a detective-sergeant. Finding the body doesn't seem to have upset you. What do you do for a living?"

"Freelance commercial art, but it hasn't been too long since I saw more than my share of dead men."

"Vietnam?"

I nodded.

"Where do you live?"

I gave her the address.

She glanced at my exercise suit. "Do you run through the park every morning?"

"More or less."

"The dead man also appears to have been a jogger. Have you ever seen him before?"

I nodded. "We've passed each other occasionally. I also knew him slightly. His name is Ernest Whitely. He was an accountant for one of my former clients."

Her eyebrows rose a fraction. "That's a big help. His suit had no pockets and he carried no identification. Do you know where he lived?"

I shook my head.

"I didn't know him that well."

"Did you see anyone else in the park this morning?"

"I seldom do. He and I were generally the only ones here at this hour."

"Have you seen anything on your runs to account for this?" She indicated the men climbing the slope with the body. "No personal experiences or reports of someone being held up here during the early morning?"

"Nothing. A jogger's natural enemies are automobiles and dogs. I've never heard of one being shot; holding up a jogger would be an act of stupidity. In addition to seldom carrying identification, I know of very few who carry money. I carry a few dimes in case I have to phone someone to rescue me if I twist my ankle or something, but that's all. Push a gun into my ribs and I'll gladly give you my thirty cents."

"When would it be convenient for you to stop by headquarters to dictate and sign a statement, Mr. Hollis?"

"Why not get it over with now? That is, if you'll see that I get a lift to my house when it's done."

Her eyes had an amused gleam. "Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to jog home?"

"Quite sure. I'm not in training and have no intention of ever competing in the Boston Marathon. I run every morning if I can, but I don't extend myself."

She motioned to one of the uniformed men. "Take Mr. Hollis in to the municipal building and give him a lift home after he signs his statement."

The man nodded, and we walked the fifty yards out to the road.

"She seems to know what she's doing," I said.

"No question about that," one said.

"I knew they had women on the force in the city, but I didn't know we had a woman detective out here."

"Only suburban force that does," said the other. "Do you have any objection?"

"Not me. All I ever expect from anyone is that they get the job done."

He motioned me into the rear seat. "You can count on Jennie Locke to do that. If I killed the guy in the red suit, I'd be worried."

An hour and a half later, the police dropped me off at my house. That I'd found Whitely's body didn't affect me too greatly. As I'd told Detective Locke, I had seen dead men before, had seen them die beside me, and

if I hadn't discovered the body someone else would have. So when you came down to it, none of it had anything to do with me—unless, of course, some whacko intended to knock off a jogger in the park every so often for some obscure reason. That thought occurred to me but I didn't bother to dwell on it. I intended to stay with my routine until I had a good reason to deviate from it.

When I left the house for my run the following morning it was still dark and, as usual, a mile passed before I was jogging freely, the ground seeming to flow effortlessly beneath me as I floated along in a slightly euphoric state, convinced I could go on forever.

I reached the park and turned in as the sky grew lighter, following the macadam path past the dead flower gardens and the muddy athletic fields, angling up toward the far end where I had found the body and where the path turned away from the street on the far end and looped around the park perimeter so that I would eventually arrive back at my starting point.

As I came out from beneath the trees I saw a figure in the distance trot up to the spot where I had found the body, stop, and glance at its wrist. As I came closer I recognized Jennifer Locke.

On her, an old sweatshirt stenciled **STOLEN FROM THE POLICE DEPARTMENT**, jeans, and expensive jogging shoes looked good enough to establish a fashion.

I stopped. "Working on the case, I see. Any progress?"

"A little. Whitely religiously left the house each morning at six-thirty and returned an hour later. When he hadn't arrived home by eight-thirty, his wife sensed something was wrong and called the police. Your on-the-spot identification was a big help."

I smiled. "Does your investigation require you to run?"

"If I want to see how long it would take him to reach this point. I left my car at his house."

"Why not have someone do it for you?"

"Perhaps no one else in the police department is capable of running three miles."

"Then let me reward your devotion to duty by offering you breakfast. Afterward, I'll drive you to wherever you left your car."

"Are you sure you can cook?"

"Did I ask if you're sure you can detect?"

She smiled.

I glanced around. "I'd like to point out that if some screwball killed Whitely, we make excellent targets simply standing here."

"I really don't think you have anything to worry about, Mr. Hollis, but if someone *were* to shoot at us it would simplify things, wouldn't it?"

"That would depend on which of us was the target," I said. "Let's go."

She fell in step alongside me. I've always liked to imagine I have the kind of stride that would leave most people behind but she stayed with me easily.

My house is small, more of a cottage, and I had converted the dining room into a studio because the French windows that lead to the garden face north. She wandered through it as I whipped up eggs, toast, and coffee. Through the doorway I could see her running her finger down the titles of the books on the shelves.

She leaned in the doorway to the kitchen. "I see you have an interest in small firearms."

"My hobby is gun collecting."

"Where do you keep them?"

"Well hidden and protected in case someone breaks in."

"Any particular type?"

"I try to center around the Civil War period."

"Anything more modern? Like a nine mm.?"

I glanced at her. "Is that what killed Whitely?" I asked.

"Yes."

I paused, the coffee pot in my hand. "I may be wrong, but I sense you didn't come here because you were interested in a free meal. You're not making conversation—you're really hard at work. May I ask why?"

She folded her arms across her chest. "There are two good reasons, Mr. Hollis."

I poured the coffee. "You'll have to explain. And call me Obie."

"All right—Obie. Whitely left his house at six-thirty. You found him shortly after seven. It takes half an hour to run from his house to the spot where he was found, which means you had to be in the vicinity when he was killed. It was early morning and very quiet in the park, yet you didn't mention hearing a shot."

"You specified two reasons."

"You neglected to mention that the reason you knew Mr. Whitely was because you had an argument with him about six months ago."

"It wasn't an argument, it was a difference of opinion. I had sent a client a bill I considered entirely justified. Whitely didn't agree. He imagined himself as some sort of superwatchdog of his client's finances. Because Whitely questioned the bill, it created a doubt in my client's mind as to my honesty. Since he felt that way, I told him to forget it—but, in addition to the money, it cost me a client and a friend. I felt compelled to visit Whitely's office to tell him what I thought of him."

"His people say you threatened him."

"If telling him I should flatten him between the pages of a ledger is a threat—yes, I did."

"They also said Whitely considered having you arrested for assault."

"I never touched the man."

"We now have only your word for that. All I can tell you is that when his office staff learned he'd been killed they immediately brought up your name—without even knowing that you had been the one to find him."

I shrugged. "I never carry a grudge. It was over and done with when I walked out of his office. Take my word for it."

"I really can't do that," she said quietly. "Sometimes these things go deeper than they appear and are not easily forgotten. For all we know the argument may have been renewed in the park and intensified, giving you both motive and opportunity. There's a third factor. Capability. We checked you out, Obie. Your war record is remarkable, but all those medals show you're no stranger to violence."

"That was during a war. The war is over."

"True, but you did choose not to tell us how you happened to know him, which we read as concealing information."

"You *do* seriously consider me a suspect!" Those level blue eyes were fixed on me. I felt like something skewered on a pin and held under a microscope. "If I'm a suspect, aren't you just a little nervous being here alone with me?"

"I'm questioning your cooperation, not your intelligence, Obie."

"Then sit down and eat your breakfast. As far as hearing the shot is concerned, I really don't have an answer for you. I heard nothing, but you're right when you say he hadn't been dead long. When I felt for his pulse, he was still warm. I also remember seeing powder burns on his jacket, which meant the gun was held close. Is there a possibility it was pressed to him and the report muffled?"

She shook her head. "The pattern indicates it wasn't."

"Well, you're the detective, so you'll have to figure it out. I *will* throw in this information though. After I determined he was dead and ran for the phone, some little thing about the body bothered me. I didn't know what it was and I still don't, and I probably wouldn't have even thought of it if the subject hadn't come up. If I remember, I'll call you."

"I'd appreciate that." The voice was pleasant enough but I had the feeling the microscope was still focused on me.

I learned she was in police work because she liked it, which was as good a reason as any. I also learned that Whitely had had an excellent reputation as an accountant, quite a respectable list of clients, and—aside from me—no apparent enemies. No one, it appeared, had the slightest reason to kill him.

A half hour later I drove her to where she had left her car parked before the Whitely home, a small colonial house on a wide street lined with trees, typically suburban, the street dipping abruptly and tunneling beneath the tracks of the commuter rail line that served the community.

"Excuse me for a moment," she said. "There's something I must ask Mrs. Whitely."

She rang the doorbell and a blonde woman, somewhat shorter than Jennie and a good ten years younger than Whitely, answered. I leaned against the car and waited. Jennie came out a few minutes later. The woman stood in the doorway talking to her, then Jennie came down the path.

"Mrs. Whitely?" I asked.

She nodded.

"I didn't expect her to be so young." I held the car door for her. "I have an idea I'd like to try if you agree. Suppose I start out tomorrow morning as usual while you wait for me at the spot where Whitely was found. Within the time span you think he was killed, fire a blank or two so that we can see if it's possible to hear anything. There may be something about the terrain out there that will hide a sharp report unless you're very close."

She looked at me for a minute before she said, "If that's what you'd like."

I closed the door. "Just trying to clear myself."

"And suppose you don't?"

I shrugged. "Will I be any worse off?"

I watched her pull away before I drove down the hill, through the

underpass beneath the tracks to the main thoroughfare, and headed for the park.

At one time or another everyone likes to play detective. I was no exception, particularly since I'd been cast in the role of suspect. I wished that either I or Whitely had chosen a different place to jog and that someone else had found him. But it was too late now.

The obvious route Whitely would have taken to the park was lined with small commercial establishments of various types, none of which would be open that early in the morning. So, aside from the cars on the road, no one would have seen him go by. Whitely had run alone and died alone.

I left the car near the phone booth from which I had called the police and walked along the path toward where the body had been found. Several uniformed men, along with Carconi, were spread out and walking slowly, scrutinizing the grass and peering beneath bushes. I didn't have to be told they were looking for either a spent shell or the weapon—or both.

Before one of them could spot me, I backed up hastily, feeling that any explanation I could give for being there would sound stupid. I drove home, resolving to keep my nose out of it and regretting I had suggested the experiment to Jennie.

I managed to leave on time the following morning. As I turned into the park, running easily, the only sounds my breathing and the slap of my running shoes, I heard what sounded like a dull pop. A few minutes later I heard another, louder this time—and, as I passed through the last stand of trees, a third.

She and Carconi were waiting.

I stopped and spread my hands. "You fired three times."

Carconi nodded. "That's right."

"It's possible I could have missed the first one. It wasn't very loud and another noise could have masked it, but the last two were clear so I guess that's your explanation. The gun was fired as I came up to the park or just as I turned in and something kept me from hearing it."

"It sounds reasonable," Jennie said.

I didn't like the lack of conviction in her voice.

I pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at my forehead. "That's it, then. Nothing more I can think of."

The blue eyes were very steady and very probing. I tucked the hand-

kerchief away. "If there's anything more I can do let me know."

I started moving, the morning air cold on my damp face.

I hadn't gone ten yards when I realized what had bothered me about Whitely's body and why I probably hadn't heard the report of that pistol. But because I was a little piqued at being considered a suspect when all I had done was my so-called civic duty—or because I didn't like being looked at like something under a microscope—I didn't turn back and tell her right then. I kept running, intending to hold the information in reserve and spring it on her when she least expected it. I don't know, maybe there was a little male chauvinism in it too. I knew something she didn't and I wanted to show myself superior in some manner.

I jogged home, showered, finished an assignment, threw it into my portfolio, and delivered it to a client. Since it was late morning, he suggested we have lunch together at an out-of-the-way restaurant called the Quill and Grille or something equally euphonious. He'd never been there and neither had I. As the hostess escorted us to our table I glanced around at the clientele. A blonde seated at a back table caught my eye. She was leaning forward, holding hands with a man, and talking earnestly.

It was Mrs. Whitely.

From the back the man looked somewhat familiar, but just then they rose to leave and I saw him clearly. He was big, with shoulders that strained the fabric of his expensive sportcoat, curly brown hair, and a square face bisected by a full moustache.

His name was Barber Pennel and he was the man I had told Jennie Locke had once been both a client and a friend—the man who had chosen to side with Whitely instead of me. And now I knew why.

"Hello, Barber," I said quietly.

He paused, then nodded. "Obie." Mrs. Whitely, after a startled glance at me, continued on her way.

I let the sarcasm show in my voice. "There's an old saying, Barber, that if a man lives long enough all things become clear."

"Don't make something out of nothing, Obie."

"That's my job, Barber. I create things, but it doesn't require any talent to see why you went along with Whitely."

He pushed past me and walked away.

I drove home slowly. Again I had a piece of information that would be of interest to Jennie Locke and again I was reluctant to call her—this

time because I knew the call would leave me with an uncomfortable feeling. I had always made it a point to avoid gossip and mind my own business and, after all, Barber Pennel had once been a friend. The meeting with Mrs. Whitely undoubtedly meant they were having an affair, which, with Barber, was nothing unusual. If my hobby was collecting guns, his was collecting attractive women.

In any event, the matter could keep, unless Jennie Locke decided to give me a hard time. Besides, during the past three days I had let my work get behind and clients are generally not very understanding.

I should have noticed the strange car parked near the house when I trotted off the next morning, but I didn't. I had covered no more than a block when it passed me and Barber Pennel stepped out, blocking my path and holding a small pistol close to his body.

"Get behind the wheel, Obie, or I'll shoot you here and now."

I stood there, the shock turning my hands cold. The flatness in his voice told me he meant what he said. I glanced around for help, but the houses were dark, the neighborhood still asleep. So much for early-morning exercise, I thought.

I took the wheel of the car. He slid in beside me.

"Drive to the park," he said. "Slowly. I don't want you there in a hurry."

"The only reason I can think of for this is that you killed Whitely," I said.

"It was the only way we could get rid of him. He was very stubborn—as you know, Obie."

"You did it for the woman?"

"That was part of it, but you know my business, Obie. The opportunities to steal are limited, but I managed. Whitely's next audit was coming up and, being the straight-laced type, he'd have turned me in. If I could replace the money it would have been no problem. But I couldn't, and Internal Revenue won't take excuses. They'd have padlocked the place."

"Which they will probably still do."

"Not for a while."

"What does it have to do with me?"

"You saw us together and you have a way of analyzing things and coming up with the right answer. Once you saw us it was a simple step to the rest of it."

"You should have waited. Knowing how you go from one woman to another it never occurred to me that you'd found one you'd kill for."

"I told you that was only part of it, but you opened the door, Obie. Until you saw us together she was just the grieving widow of a man no one had any reason to kill."

"Except me, according to the police. Why did you dump him in the park? So I could find him?"

"I didn't even know you went there until I read it in the paper. It was a coincidence. I put him in the park so everyone would think he was knocked off by some kind of nut. When they find your body, it'll reinforce that theory. After all, no one has any reason to kill you, Obie, any more than anyone had a reason to kill him. It'll be just another senseless murder. Pull over, Obie, and get out slowly. I'll have to handle you a little differently. He refused to get into the car, so I had to shoot him on his own street, in that underpass. No one was down there to see or hear, but it meant I was forced to carry him into the park. I don't intend to do the same with you. You're much bigger than he was."

We walked down the path. I had no idea what I could do, but I didn't intend to stand still and make it easy for him when the time came.

"How far are we going?" I asked.

"Not too far. It doesn't have to be the same spot. The general vicinity will do."

The sky was turning grey and the shapes of the trees were beginning to take form. I made up my mind that whatever I did I would do it before we left the evergreens that grew close to the path at that point. If I could get among them they would offer some protection.

He seemed to sense what I was thinking.

"Hold it, Obie."

I stopped.

"Turn around."

The gun in his hand was very steady.

I cleared my throat and tried to lie convincingly. "I think you should know, Barber, that I did call the police yesterday and tell them it might be worth their time to look into the relationship between you and Mrs. Whitely."

"A temporary inconvenience. We were very discreet, and I have an excellent alibi for the morning Whitely was killed. There's a woman who will swear I never left her side."

"How about this morning?"

"If she's willing to lie once, she'll lie twice, Obie. After they find your body they'll forget about me."

My mind was moving fast. "There's something else you should know. Because of that argument I had with Whitely and because I found the body, I'm the only suspect. They have a man watching my house."

He smiled. "I checked your street very thoroughly, Obie."

"You didn't check well enough." I let my eyes shift to the emptiness over his shoulder and raised my voice as though someone was standing behind him. "Take it easy!" I called. "He still has a gun on me!"

The voice rolled out of the evergreens, crisp and authoritative, like some omniscient presence, shocking both of us. "We know, Obie—just stand still!"

Barber Pennel froze, his eyes wide for a moment, then flicking frantically about, looking for the source of the voice. Jennie Locke stepped out of the trees in a semi-crouch, her revolver held before her with both hands and fixed steadily on Barber, her blue eyes very cold.

"Drop the gun, Mr. Pennel," she said sharply.

/Somewhere in her training or experience, Jennie had missed a lesson. Leaving the shelter of those trees while Barber still held the gun was a mistake. She expected him to be sensible and give up, but Barber had always believed he was better than most men—and all women—at anything. At that moment the look in his eye said he was convinced he could outshoot her—which meant that I'd be in the middle of a shootout and one of us might die for no reason.

Just as his arm twitched toward her I swept out my left hand, brushed his gun aside, and chopped my right fist down hard on his jaw. Barber went down and lay still. I kicked the gun away.

Jennie came up slowly, her face white, her voice tight with anger. "I might have killed you. Why didn't you stay out of it?"

I indicated Barber, who was beginning to stir. "Do you prefer him this way or dead?"

Carconi and several uniformed men came running up.

"I could have handled him," she said.

"You could have handled someone like me. Most men never argue with a gun, no matter who's holding it. Barber isn't one of them. What were you doing here anyway?"

"Several of us were stationed along the path to keep an eye on you."

"What for?" I asked coldly. "Were you expecting me to retrieve the gun you thought I'd hidden so carefully, or to kill someone else?" I turned away from her and sank to a large rock by the side of the path, knees weak, the morning's events finally catching up with me.

The thought that she had stationed men to watch me made me angry and also destroyed whatever respect I had for her ability to do her job. If she wasn't wise or sensitive enough to realize I hadn't killed Whitely she didn't deserve that badge she was so proud of.

The doorbell rang that afternoon. She was wearing the dark jacket and slacks and white blouse she had worn when I first saw her, and looked less like a cop than ever.

I walked back to my studio. She followed.

"After talking to Barber Pennel I can see he would have made a fight of it," she said. "I would have had to shoot him, which is something I hope I never have to do to anyone. I stopped by to thank you, Obie. I guess I owe you one."

"Consider us even. I'd probably be dead if you hadn't been there, even if it was for the wrong reason."

"Wrong reason? We were there to protect you."

I stared at her. "From what?"

"We weren't quite sure, but we considered it worth the effort."

"If you felt I needed protection, the least you could have done was tell me."

"How about the things you never told me, Obie? First, about your argument with Whitely. Second, that he hadn't been killed in the park. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Well, yes. When I felt for his pulse there was no perspiration on his skin. He couldn't possibly have run for miles. He had to have been killed elsewhere and carried to the park, which was why I never heard a shot."

"And you saw Mrs. Whitely and Pennel together yesterday, which was important information, but you never called."

"I'm no gossip monger and I didn't want to point a finger at a former friend. But how did you know I'd seen them?"

"The man who was tailing you saw them leave the restaurant."

"So you *were* confident I was responsible for Whitely's murder."

"We follow people for many reasons. You develop a sixth sense in this business, Obie. I had a feeling you'd lead us somewhere, and you did."

After connecting Barber Pennel and Mrs. Whitely, it was obvious to us he had a far better motive than you. Then it occurred to me that since he tried to make it appear as though Whitely had been killed in the park, he might use another victim to convince us there was a madman loose there at that hour. Since you were there each morning you were the logical candidate."

I bowed. "I apologize for thinking you incompetent."

The blue eyes were amused. "Well, I'm not exactly perfect, Obie, but I do consider myself a much better detective than you are a cook. Frankly, you're the first person I ever knew who could brutalize toast and eggs—"

I pointed at the kitchen. "Be my guest anytime."

"—other than myself."

I sighed. "I should have known. However, let's hope we aren't equally inept in other facets of what I hope will be a long and lasting relationship."

I reached for my coat. "Where would you like to have dinner?"

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Howard was delighted with the way he was handling the opportunity . . .

THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE WORLD



Howard Simpson smiled obligingly at the woman, removed a second tray of brooches from the display case, and set it on the glass counter between them. The woman bent to examine the sparkling pins.

From the far end of the jewelry store Mr. Curtland, the manager of the Sixth Street branch of Citizen's Jewelers, watched them while pretending to be engrossed in his ledgers. Howard, without looking, could feel the covert scrutiny. How long, he brooded, had he worked for Mr.

THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE WORLD

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Curtland? Four years? No, closer to five. And before that, six years with Imperial Jewelers. He knew the intricacies of gems and gold and silver, and yet Mr. Curtland continually dealt with him as if he were a novice.

"Thank you," said the woman, startling Howard. She put her gloves on and said she would like to shop around a bit more before deciding. When the door closed behind her, Mr. Curtland slammed his ledger shut with a snap that almost caused Howard to drop the brooches as he stooped to return them to the display case.

"Simpson!" Mr. Curtland barked.

Miss Newcomb, the only other employee, looked up at the sharp crack of his voice.

"Yes, sir," Howard replied quickly. He was a short slim man with thinning hair; he invariably wore a white shirt and a solid tie with either his dark-blue or charcoal-grey suit. Today was a dark-blue day.

"That woman," Mr. Curtland said, "wanted a brooch in the range of several hundred dollars." It was a flat statement.

"Yes, sir," Howard replied, standing stiffly at attention.

"Well, why didn't she buy one?"

Howard shifted uneasily. "Well, she—I think she thought the stones were too small for the price."

"You *think*." Mr. Curtland's thin moustache twitched on his thick red face. "Did you tell her how many points there were to each diamond she asked about?"

Howard looked across at Miss Newcomb. Miss Newcomb flushed and turned swiftly away.

"I did mention it, sir. Yes." Howard nodded his head and his glasses slipped down his nose. Pushing them back, he noticed that his hand was trembling again.

"I heard you 'mention' it, Simpson," said Mr. Curtland, his bird-eyes narrowing. "How many times do I have to tell you—with the small diamonds you play *down* the carats and play *up* the points! The *points*, Simpson, the points!"

"Of course, sir. But carats and points are the same thing, and most people—"

"I know that, Simpson." Mr. Curtland sniffed impatiently. "You do not lie, Simpson. I do not ask you to lie. If a diamond is point-one-four of a carat you mention it quickly *if asked*, and then go on to impress upon the customer that it is, in fact, a beautiful fourteen-point diamond. And

you *continue* to refer to it as a fourteen-point diamond. A fourteen-point diamond, Simpson! A fourteen-point diamond sounds regal. Well?"

"Yes, Mr. Curtland."

"Then don't let me have to remind you again." He ran the palm of his heavy hand over his eyes and sighed. Howard turned away.

"Simpson."

"Sir?"

"I've decided to attend that Jewelers' Convention in Denver. That means I won't be in until Friday. I'll be leaving the store in your hands for the next three days."

Howard brightened. "I can handle it, Mr. Curtland. You go ahead and have a good time in Denver. Miss Newcomb and I will look after everything here."

Mr. Curtland left on the evening flight and early the following morning, shortly after Howard and Miss Newcomb opened the store, the cowboy came in.

At least it was Howard's immediate impression that the man was a cowboy. He was older than Howard, with a brown, pleasant face, and he wore a suit, leather boots with the peculiar western cut of toe and heel, and a string tie that was gathered at his collar with a miniature buckle. The buckle was solid gold.

"May I be of assistance?" Howard asked.

"I'd like to see something in a diamond pendant," said the cowboy without a trace of a Texas drawl, which momentarily disappointed Howard.

"Certainly. Did you have anything in particular in mind? A particular price range?"

"Hadn't really thought about it." The cowboy slipped a hand in his pocket and leaned lightly on the counter. "Let's see what you have."

Howard brought out several pendants. Attached to each pendant was a small price tag, the price written on it in ink. The cowboy examined them briefly.

"Five hundred dollars," he said. "Are these the best you have?"

"Oh, no—we have some here—" Howard motioned to the glass case at his back "—which run as high as forty-five hundred dollars."

"Well, haul them out, son," the man said heartily.

As Howard unlocked the case he added, "What's your name?"

"Howard, sir. Howard Simpson."

"Well, Howard, let's have a look at these." He studied the pendants carefully. "What's this one here?"

"Ah," said Howard, "you have excellent taste, sir." He lifted the necklace delicately from among the rest. "This star-shaped pendant has a fourteen-carat white-gold chain with a one-quarter carat diam—that is, a twenty-five point diamond at its center, and genuine blue sapphires in each of the six points of the star."

"What's the going price on that one, Howard?"

"That's—" Howard turned the price tag—"\$3,899.99, sir."

"Fine." The cowboy grinned boyishly. "I'll take it. And what are those? There." He pointed to the same black-velvet display tray.

"They're the matching earrings, sir. Actually, it's a complete set."

"I'll take those too."

"Sir—" Howard coughed. "The earrings sell for \$6,995.99. You see, each earring contains smaller replicas of the gems in the pendant, so there are twice as many—"

"Perfect! You'll take a check for the complete set?" The man drew a leather checkbook from his pocket and opened it on the counter.

Across the store Howard saw Miss Newcomb watching them.

The cowboy cheerfully began to fill in the check. "Howard, I want you to take this check to my bank and cash it. I'm leaving town this afternoon on business, but I'll be back on Friday to collect the pendant and the earrings. O.K.?"

"Why, O.K.," Howard breathed, relaxing. "I mean, certainly." He totaled the costs, including tax, completed the receipt, and the cowboy handed him the check.

"Now I'd like to see your finest diamond ring. An engagement ring," the cowboy confided, winking.

"Of course—" Howard looked at the check—"Mr. Randall. May I ask the price range?"

"Oh, somewhere around twenty thousand. Let's start there."

Howard's eyes widened. "I'm afraid we don't keep a display of diamonds in that price range, sir. Eight thousand would be our best in stock."

The cowboy cocked his head and made a clicking noise of disappointment with his tongue. Howard gazed at him for a moment, his mind working furiously. Then suddenly he nodded and smiled as if he had made a great discovery.

He said, "Why don't I arrange to have a display of higher-priced rings here when you come in to pick up the pendant? I can get them from the main branch."

"Why, that sounds like a fine idea, Howard."

"Good. I'll have a dozen or so in that price range brought over and you can select one at your leisure."

"Great. First thing Friday morning, then. This is for the prettiest little lady in the world, Howard, and it has to be the best. You understand? The best you have."

"Leave it to me, sir," said Howard, his voice smooth. "I know exactly what you want."

"See you Friday, then," said the cowboy.

Later in the day Howard went to the bank indicated on Mr. Randall's check. He anticipated no trouble cashing the check, and received none. When he returned to the store he locked the money in the safe, then phoned the manager at the main branch of the jewelry chain.

Howard arrived at the main store early the next morning. He and the manager chatted briefly, then selected an appropriate display of rings. It took them over an hour to draw up the paperwork, and when it was checked and rechecked Howard signed his name for fourteen diamond rings at a total value of \$247,000. The rings were placed in a black leather briefcase which was then handcuffed to Howard's left wrist. The manager rose to see him out but Howard, perspiring, insisted that the store guard accompany him across town in a cab.

Only when the gems were safely deposited in the safe in his own store and he had thanked the departing guard did Howard's heartbeat return to normal.

The following day, his voice harsh and rasping, he phoned in sick.

"You just stay home in bed," said Miss Newcomb in a gentle and concerned tone. "It's probably the flu. I'll look after things here."

"Thank you," said Howard weakly. "I'm sure I'll be feeling better by tomorrow, Miss Newcomb."

"It's quite all right. Just you take some aspirin and get lots of rest."

Howard hung up the phone and smiled, pleased. Miss Newcomb was definitely treating him with more respect and consideration since his handling of what he had come to think of as the Randall opportunity. It

was truly amazing, he thought, how such a small incident could so significantly alter a man's life. All you had to do was wait. It was simply a matter of patience.

Mr. Curtland returned from Denver Thursday evening, and on Friday morning he was already in the store talking to Miss Newcomb when Howard arrived. As Howard entered, Mr. Curtland spun about and strode over to clasp his hand. "Congratulations, Simpson," he said. "Sally told me all about it." He laughed and slapped Howard on the shoulder.

"Thank you, sir," Howard said without smiling.

"When did this Mr. Randall say he'd be here?"

"First thing this morning."

"Good! Now when he comes in I'll take it from there."

As he spoke, the cowboy walked through the door dressed in brown loafers, a suit and necktie, and a light overcoat.

"How are you, Howard?" he said, as though greeting an old friend.

"Fine, sir," Howard replied dully.

Mr. Curtland rushed over and stretched his hand across the counter. "Mr. Randall? I'm Horace Curtland, the manager. I understand Mr. Simpson here has been very helpful to you."

"Yes, sir, he has been that. I'm extremely satisfied."

"Good, good. Mr. Simpson, would you get Mr. Randall's pendant from the safe? And the rings." He turned to the cowboy. "Are you still interested in purchasing a ring, sir?"

"Yes, of course," Randall replied impatiently.

"Simpson," Mr. Curtland called, "hurry it a-little, please."

Presently Howard emerged with a blue-velvet box in one hand and a black-velvet display board of gleaming rings in the other. He laid them gently on the counter.

"If you'd like to examine the pendant—" said Mr. Curtland.

"That won't be necessary," the cowboy replied. "Miss!"

Miss Newcomb looked up curiously as the cowboy drew a gun from his coat pocket.

"The alarm," he said without emotion, "is three feet to your left, Howard. Don't move a muscle toward it. I like you. Don't make me do anything reckless. You, Miss—lock that door."

Miss Newcomb, pale and swaying, walked unsteadily to the front door and locked it.

"Into the back room," the cowboy said. "You too, Miss. Let's go."

As they passed around the counter the cowboy picked up the pendant and the rings and carried them to the desk in the back room. He brought a roll of surgical tape from his pocket and had Miss Newcomb tape Mr. Curtland's ankles, hands, and mouth according to his instructions. Then he had her tape Howard and, putting the gun down, he taped up Miss Newcomb himself. He then ran the tape around the ankles of all three, swung their legs about, and made a single connection to Mr. Curtland's heavy metal desk.

"It's been great doing business with you," he said and slipped the boxed pendant into one pocket, plucked the rings from the slots in the board, and dropped them carelessly into the other pocket. For a moment he stood looking around as if he had forgotten something, then he picked up his gun and walked out.

Lying on the floor, wrapped tightly together in the white tape, they heard him close and lock the front door.

Detective Sergeant McGuire closed his notebook. "Well, I think I have everything. It's just too bad you people took so long to reach the alarm. Two hours is a long start. When this trick is used in a jewel robbery it gives the thief too much time. I'd venture to say he was away on a plane minutes after he left here. It's a pretty standard M.O."

"Trick? Did you say trick, Sergeant?" Mr. Curtland, who had been sitting sullenly holding his head, sprang up. "What do you mean, trick?"

"It's the oldest trick in the world," said McGuire flatly. "The thief has everything arranged so that what he wants is ready and waiting for him. No searching, no broken glass, no noise, no delays—quick and easy. He has, in effect, placed an order for the robbery." He grinned. "Like a grocery list. You know?"

Mr. Curtland turned pale. He cast a blazing look at Howard.

"Do you hear that, Simpson? The world's oldest trick! *You fool!*" he raged. "You're fired, Simpson! Get out of here. Get out of my sight!"

McGuire looked at them with weary eyes. "There'll be statements to sign or mug shots to go over," he said and turned to leave. "Just don't anyone leave town."

Alone in his apartment, Howard put a fresh pot of coffee on the stove. While it was perking he took the small black bag from the pocket of his

coat, spread the drawstring, and poured the fourteen rings on the table.

He smiled. One day with the flu, he thought, had been plenty of time to purchase imitation replacements around town. Although the cubic zirconia and the other synthetic gems he'd bought had been a little more expensive than he had anticipated, it was still a fine investment.

The oldest trick in the world, he mused, and laughed aloud. Well, of course it was. He would have to have been an utter novice not to have recognized it ten minutes after talking to Randall; just as he had recognized it at Imperial Jewelers in Boston six years ago.

In a few months he would leave the city and find a new job in another jewelry store. Los Angeles, perhaps. Yes, he had always liked the idea of living in Southern California. Then he would just wait. There would always be another cowboy along. It was just a matter of patience.

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To Carlos Bannón it sounded like an impossible case . . .

DEATH IN THE BARRIO

by
KENNETH
GAVRELL



We had arranged to meet for lunch. She'd said she would feel most comfortable talking about it that way. She didn't like offices and thought it would be an imposition to ask me to drive out to her place in Bayamon.

That was all right with me; I had to eat lunch anyway. But I wouldn't have chosen this place: phony-looking wood paneling, plastic flowers on the snow-white tablecloths, and waitresses in cutesy aproned skirts. The kind of restaurant you'd expect to find in Disneyland rather than on San

Juan's Condado. Unfortunately it fit into the Condado all-too well these days.

I was nursing a Corona beer when she arrived—ten minutes late.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I couldn't find a place to park."

I smiled my that's-all-right smile and held her chair for her. She was about thirty-five and would have been pretty if she weren't so overweight. Eggshell-blue eyes, hefty breasts, and hair as fine and golden as a doll's.

"You aren't what I expected," she said.

"What did you expect?"

"Someone frumpier, tougher-looking. Maybe older. It's hard to tell anything from your telephone voice."

"You want a drink?" I asked.

"No. I don't like to drink."

I signaled for one of the waitresses—Mary Poppins in a miniskirt—and ordered a ham sandwich. Mrs. Holling ordered a meal that would stuff a Victorian sofa. That explained the weight problem.

She smiled sheepishly: "I know I eat too much. It seems to be my way of coping since Jay died."

"It's better than drinking, I suppose." I was being Mr. Affable today.

When the food arrived she ate quickly and nervously, and it looked like she was going to finish it, but by then she'd gotten down to business. On the telephone she had said little beyond reawakening my memory about the case. It had been in the papers. About two months ago her husband, a computer programmer with IBM, had been driving down to Lake Loiza to go fishing. It was around two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. As he'd rounded a turn up in the hills in the vicinity of a few houses and stores, a gunman had fired two shots through his side window, one of which had killed him. The police had been working on it ever since, without turning up a clue. They'd checked all the houses in the area and come up without a gun or a likely suspect. They'd also checked into Mr. Holling's past and present with no results. It appeared to be a completely unmotivated killing by a sniper.

The people in the area had heard the shots but couldn't provide any other information. They hadn't seen a thing. A search of the probable location of the sniper—arrived at from a study of the car marks, bullet angle, and local testimony—produced nothing except some crushed vegetation and a grimy Winston cigarette butt.

"It sounds like an impossible case," I said.

"I don't trust the police," Mrs. Holling said. "I'm told they're not very efficient."

"On a case like this that's an understatement," I said. "But their conclusion seems the most likely: some nut who had to get something out of his system. It happens in the States all the time."

"Does it happen in Puerto Rico all the time?"

"No," I admitted. "It's pretty damn rare, actually."

She was getting into the dessert now—a chocolate sundae that would have made Sydney Greenstreet blanch.

"You want coffee?" I asked.

"Yes, please."

I ordered some from Mary Poppins.

"You're supposed to be good," she said. "I've been asking around. I want you to take the case."

"I can't promise you a thing," I said. "The odds are I won't come up with anything."

"Well, I can't go on like this," she said, her voice rising surprisingly. "I've got to know something. Look, Jay and I loved each other. We were married eight years and we still loved each other. I may be able to adjust to living without him, but I'll never adjust to not knowing why he died. I've *got to know!*"

"You've had over two months to think about it," I said soothingly. "Don't you have any idea yourself?"

"Jay had no enemies," she said. "There was certainly no other woman."

"Was he involved in politics?"

"He cared about politics as much as I care about fishing."

"So you haven't the slightest."

"That's what's so *maddening*."

"I'll have to check into your personal lives," I told her. "Bank accounts, friends, people at his office, how he spent his time—that sort of thing."

"I don't care," she said. "What will it cost?"

"I can't say. That depends on how many hours I have to put in."

"I have over ten thousand dollars in the bank," she said.

"It won't come to anything near that," I said.

The waitress brought the coffee. I had to reach to another table to supplement our sugar bowl.

I called my friend Roberto Burgos at Homicide. He was out, but got

back to me about four o'clock.

"I'm taking up the Holling case. Mrs. Holling just hired me."

"And she seemed like such an intelligent woman," Roberto said.

"Ho ho."

"What is that, your Santa Claus imitation?"

"Look, seriously, do you really think it's hopeless?"

He gave a grunt that sounded like a verbal shrug. "If you can find a connection it's not hopeless. If there's no connection—which is what we think—" He left the sentence dangling.

"You'll give me what you have?"

"*Por qué no?* We don't have much of anything."

"You don't mind my horning in?"

"I'm getting used to it. Anyway, we've given up on it," Roberto said. "But that's just between you and me."

"When can I come by?"

"Any time. I'll get out the file."

"I'll be around in fifteen minutes."

He was right: there wasn't much of anything. A lot of photos of the car, the body, even one of the crushed vegetation and the cigarrette butt. Statements from the people in the neighborhood, all pretty useless. The most interesting part was the personal stuff on Holling. He had been with IBM in San Juan for six years. Originally from Joliet, Illinois. Spent time working in Chicago and New York. A good company man, generally well liked. There was a bank account at Citibank, smaller than you'd expect, and a checking account, same place, with a little over \$1,200 in it at the time of his death. Two newish cars—a red Camaro, which he had been driving that day, and a Datsun. A \$60,000 house in Bayamon. No unusual debts for a person of his income bracket and life style. No bad habits beyond an occasional overindulgence in alcohol. No known enemies.

His photo showed a man of forty-two, fair-complected, grey eyes, nondescript-colored hair (slightly balding), glasses. You'd never notice him in a crowd. There wasn't much of the face left in the photos taken at the murder site. I copied down the data about his office, bank, and friends.

"Your men aren't very good at Easter-egg hunts," I said to Roberto. "No bullets, not even the cartridge cases."

"You know what it's like trying to find bullets outdoors," Roberto said.

"The killer apparently picked up his spent cases."

"Leaving you with no information about the gun except what little the wound provides."

"We're assuming it was a rifle," Roberto said. "He fired from about twenty yards. We can also assume it was probably a semi-automatic since he had very little time to get off two rounds with a moving target."

"Obviously no amateur with a gun," I said.

"He may have used a scope."

"Even so."

"The bullet shattered the right side of Holling's head on exit. I'd guess a high velocity, maybe a spitzer."

"Caliber?"

"Entrance wound suggests something like a .308."

"And that's it."

"That's it. I thought you liked them tough."

"I'm getting old and soft," I said.

"You'll be older by the time you solve this one," Roberto said.

That evening I looked up Holling's close friends. There were just two of them. Both worked for IBM. It turned out to be a waste of time—neither of them could provide anything I hadn't learned already. I hinted rather pointedly at a possible extramarital affair, but it was no go. Jay and Christine had had a very close marriage. Their friends envied them. They hadn't been able to have a child and had been considering adopting one at the time of his death.

The next morning—after phoning my secretary at the office, who told me nothing very important was happening—I went to the IBM headquarters in Santurce. It was the same story: no one could think of the vaguest reason why somebody would want to kill Jay Holling. After lunch I got into my Toyota Corolla and drove out to the scene of the killing.

It was one of those marvelous Puerto Rican afternoons: clear, high sky, almost painfully bright sunlight, and—once I got out of town—air that smelled of fresh vegetation and baked earth. Route 176, south of San Juan, is a typical narrow country road that winds among green hills. As in all the island, you are never very far from people; at every other turn there is a house, a restaurant, or a gas station. Girls in bright dresses, cows and chickens, abandoned ancient cars, flowering trees, loud music; dirty puddles, stands of bamboo. I reached the murder scene at about

two o'clock—oddly enough, at the same time Jay Holling had reached it the day he died.

There were a gas station, a bar, three houses, and a colmado sitting in a cluster at a high point on the road just after a curve. I swung over onto the dusty gravel in front of the bar and cut the motor. Ednita Nazario was belting one out on the bar jukebox or radio. A couple of kids were playing in front of one of the houses and two guys lounged outside the gas station, one of them cradling a can of beer. Traffic along the road was sparse. I went into the bar. A big T-shirted kid in his late teens hung over the jukebox, studying it instead of his schoolbooks. Aside from him there were only the bartender, and an old man on a stool who wasn't drinking.

The bartender looked at me pregnantly.

"Corona," I said.

"Schaefer o India nada mas."

"Schaefer está bien."

He dug a beer out of his icebox under the bar. He was an old guy too and looked like he had made that motion a million times.

"*Qué calor*," I said. "It's hot out."

He made an indifferent gesture.

The kid came over from the jukebox and stood in front of me. "You a cop?" he said, surprising me.

I looked him over. The kind of kid who'd probably seen a lot of cops in his short time.

"Funny question," I said.

"Not so funny. We get cops out here all the time lately."

"Since the 'accident,'" I said.

"I thought so," the kid said. He spat on the floor. The two old men just watched quietly.

I took a sip from my beer. It was well chilled.

"Can't you creeps leave us alone?" the kid said. His features had congealed into a permanent snarl at an early age.

"Actually I'm not a cop," I said. "I'm a private detective."

"Big deal," the kid said.

"Who hired you?" the old bartender asked, leaning on the bar.

"La viuda del norteamericano. The American's widow."

"We don't know anything," the bartender said. "The police have been here many times. We've told them all we know."

"Did you hear the shots?" I asked.

"No, I can't hear anything with that." He pointed to the jukebox.

He was right. I could barely hear him.

"What about you?" I turned to the other old guy on the stool. He looked like everybody's grandfather: about sixty-five, deeply tanned, whitening hair, healthy-looking for his age.

"Yes, I heard them," he said slowly. "There were two."

"Where were you?"

"In my house across the street. I thought it was a car backfiring."

"Did you see the car crash?"

"No. I didn't bother to look. I thought it was only backfiring."

The kid pulled a cigarette from the pocket of his over-tight T-shirt and lit it, eyeing me hostilely through a smoke cloud.

"Now what would your mama say if she knew you smoked," I said.

He replied with an obscenity directed very personally at me. I smiled. I enjoyed this kid.

"You hear the shots?" I asked him.

He carefully took the cigarette from his mouth, turned his back on me, and walked out. I made a mental note to check my hubcaps when I left.

"I'd like to see where the car crashed," I said to the bartender.

He pointed in the opposite direction from which I'd come. "It's about a hundred yards past the colmado on this side. You can't miss it."

"Why not?"

"He knocked over a couple of small trees. You'll see it."

I thanked him, paid for the beer, and strolled out into the dazzling sunlight.

I found the two trees without any trouble—small, green-trunked palms. But aside from them there was very little evidence of a car wreck only two months earlier. Nature comes back fast in Puerto Rico. This area was pretty heavily grown on both sides of the road. The two trees were about fifteen feet downhill of the road, and on the other side of it the terrain rose very gently toward some cleared land surrounding a big house built at the top of the hill.

I tried to guess where the car might have left the road, assuming it was traveling about forty miles an hour as witnesses had said, and then I tried to calculate about where Holling had been hit and where his killer would probably have been hiding. The police could have told me exactly.

So could any of these cooperative country folk. But it didn't make much difference: anyplace on that side of the road where the killer could have been hiding was heavily overgrown and well past the last house of the barrio. It was wonderful terrain for a sniper with a good rifle. One who knew how to use it, as this fellow had.

I walked back and went into the colmado. It was very dark inside after the sunlight—a dank wooden place with shelves of canned goods from floor to ceiling, barrels and sacks on the floor, and a turn-of-the-century cash register that any museum would have given its right arm for. The place suddenly shot me back thirty years to my childhood in Salinas. A Puerto Rican mother and a gringo father, a childhood spent half in Salinas and half in New York—I sometimes wasn't quite sure who I was myself.

Behind the counter stood a dowdy middle-aged woman in a pink blouse and black shirt. What looked like a mother and her son were buying rice and bacalao. The boy was maybe twelve or thirteen. The mother completed her purchase rapidly and they went out, giving me a wide berth.

I told the woman at the cash register who I was and why I was there. She took it all in without comment. "I wondered if you could help me with any information," I said.

She smoothed her skirt against her lumpy body—or perhaps she was wiping dust from her hands. "I was in Ponce all that day," she said distantly. "I'm afraid I know nothing."

"Who do you think *would* know something?" I asked.

"The police have already been through all this," she said. "We do not need private detectives as well. We live quietly here."

"Well, who do you think shot the norteamericano?"

"I have no idea. Perhaps an enemy. Perhaps just a loco."

"A loco from around here?" I asked.

"Mira," she said, "*estoy ocupada. Yo no se nada.*"

"What about the man who runs the gas station?"

"Did you want to make a purchase?" she said. "If not, I'm very busy."

"I think I'll try the gas station," I said.

"Bueno," she said. "Try the gas station."

She turned a stiff back on me and started to arrange cans on a shelf. Apparently it took more than my natural charisma to warm up these people.

The gas-station owner was a hulking brute in his early thirties, the sort

of guy you expect to have hair growing on his teeth. The butt of an S&W .38 was sticking out of the back of his pants, a practice becoming more common among gas station people, I'd noticed.

Business was slow. He was talking to a younger man of much slighter build in jeans and an open shirt. They both watched me walk up in the way people watch you who are doing their damndest to act as if they don't know you're around.

I pulled out my card and showed it to them. No reaction—it might as well have been my birth certificate. I leaned against a pump and studied the hills across the road.

"I'm investigating the shooting of the norteamericano a couple of months ago," I said.

No reaction. The hulk kicked an empty beer can toward the garage. It was a good kick—the can landed about a foot from the wall.

"What kind of name is that?" the younger man said finally. "Carlos Bannon. You a hybrid?"

This one had some education.

"My father's from the States," I said. "The full name is Carlos Bannon Santiago."

"Assimilation," said the younger one. He made a face.

"I had very little to do with it," I said. "You don't like norteamericanos?"

"No. The island's too small for them. And for all the others who come here to live off us."

"He's an independentista," said the bear indifferently. I got a look at his teeth: there was no hair on them.

"Shall we speak English?" said the younger man sarcastically. "I afraid I no spik the inglish very good."

Some clouds were beginning to build over the hills.

"It looks to me the norteamericano was shot by somebody from around here," I said quietly. "But the police couldn't find the gun. Are there many guns around here?"

"As far as I know only this one," said the big guy. He pulled it out suddenly and pointed it at my stomach. I froze. Then he laughed, his fleshy blue face corrugated like the roof over his pumps.

"You have a wonderful sense of humor," I said. "Have you got a permit for that?"

"I don't see how it's any of your business." He didn't lower the gun.

"Did the police check it out?"

"The norteamericano was killed with a rifle," he said.

"Oh? How do you know?"

"I may look stupid," he said, "but don't you believe it."

"I'd put that away," I said. "Or I may be tempted to wrap it around your thick neck."

"*Mierda*," he said, and showed me his hairless teeth again.

"Put it away," mumbled the independentista.

The bear just looked at him. Then he lifted the barrel of the gun. But he didn't put it back in his belt. "We're not answering any questions for private detectives from the big city," he said. "Now get off my property."

"I have some friends in Homicide," I said. "I'll check on that gun."

"I wouldn't push him," the younger man said. "If I were you I think I'd go, hybrid."

What the hell, I wasn't going to get anything out of them anyway.

"By the way," I said as I turned, "how did you know about me?"

"A little pig told me," the big man said. "He told the whole neighborhood. I think you better get in your car and go back to San Juan."

"I may be around a while longer," I said. "If I need any gas, I'll let you know."

"*Mierda*," he said.

I walked back toward my car. What next? Check out the houses? I didn't see the point. The old man who'd been in the bar was coming out as I approached the car.

"Are you still here?"

"As you see."

"I think you're wasting your time."

"You may be right."

"The people here are fed up with all the notoriety."

"I can understand that," I said.

"You want a cup of good coffee? My wife makes very good coffee. I'll show you we are not really inhospitable to strangers."

"All right," I said.

"I live over there," He pointed to the first house on the right: flat-roofed, cheap, hot, concrete. There were flower pots lined along the porch.

"Thank you," I said as we crossed the street together. My soul needed a little friendliness just then.

"What's your name?" the old man asked.

"Carlos."

"Mine's Ricardo."

"*Mucho gusto.*"

He led the way into the open doorway of the house.

We sat in his rather baroque living room while his wife made coffee in the kitchen. As old people will often do, he took out an album of family snapshots. He was especially proud of his granddaughter.

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Four."

"Very pretty," I said, which was true.

"Yes," he agreed. "She is the person I love most in the world."

A young woman appeared at the doorway. One look at her and I realized she was the child's mother.

"Oh, come in, Alicia. This is my daughter," he said to me.

We exchanged *encantados*. She too was very pretty. She seemed embarrassed and excused herself to join her mother in the kitchen.

"Here's a picture of me when I was young," Ricardo continued.

The photo showed a handsome man in his late twenties wearing an Army uniform. A black moustache and a smile that would have charmed the ladies. "I was in the infantry during the war. I was in Italy."

The war: for him, World War II.

"I was in Vietnam," I said. "When it was just starting."

He nodded.

There were other pictures of him in uniform and several with his wife, who had not weathered the years as well. But most of the pictures were of his daughter and granddaughter. Not many of the son-in-law.

I wondered if the daughter was divorced. While I was wondering, she came in with our coffee.

"You bore everyone with those photographs," she said.

"He's not bored. Are you, Carlos?"

"No," I said. "After all the hostility I've met here, it's a pleasure."

"We're all tired of the police," Alicia said. So she knew who I was too. I noticed what a fine figure she had as she leaned over with the coffee tray.

"What happened after the car crashed?" I asked. "Did anyone try to find the killer?"

"No one had any idea where the shots came from," she said.

"There were no strangers around that day?"

"No one remembered any strangers," she said.

The old man excused himself and went to the bathroom. Alicia was clearly uncomfortable being left alone with me.

"You have a beautiful daughter," I said, trying to put her at ease.

"Yes, she was."

"Was?"

"She died some months ago."

I understood then what is meant by an eerie feeling.

"My father spoke as if she were alive?" Alicia said.

"Yes."

"He does that. My father is getting old. It is not so easy to accommodate yourself to changes when you get old."

It rained most of the way back. The weather does that in Puerto Rico: a beautiful day suddenly dissolves in a downpour.

I pulled into San Juan at about five o'clock, feeling tired. Enough for one day. Plenty to think about. I took a shower, ate, and went out to a movie.

The next morning I was at the office by nine. Maria was typing up a report for a client—the usual divorce stuff. I told her to get Burgos at Homicide on the phone.

He came on, sounding abnormally cheerful. "Well, how's it going, Sherlock Holmes?"

"I'm not sure yet."

"Did you go out there?"

"Yes. You would have thought I had the plague."

He chuckled appreciatively.

"Look, Roberto, I want you to do a couple of things for me, and get back to me as soon as you can."

"Depends what the 'things' are," he said. "Let's have it."

Mrs. Holling had called my office and invited me to lunch again. She was going to be in San Juan anyway. The "anyway" made me feel less flattered by the invitation.

We went to the same restaurant. Once again she ordered enough for two of me.

"You don't eat much," she remarked.

"No. I drink."

"On the phone you sounded as if you might have learned something."

"I think I have."

"Well, tell me," she said anxiously.

"I can't. Not yet. I have to go out to that barrio again. Right now all I have is a hunch."

"How do hunches become facts?"

"I'll let you know when I get back."

"You think someone out there shot Jay?"

"It seems the only reasonable assumption at this point."

"But who? Why?"

"I know this is bad for you," I said. "I hope that by later tonight I'll be able to tell you."

"Why later tonight?"

"I'm not going out there till six o'clock."

"Is there any danger?"

"No," I lied.

"Shall I come with you? I have nothing to do this evening."

"No," I said. "I think I'd better go alone."

The small group of buildings looked pretty under a wine-colored sunset, like something from a Haitian painting. In twenty minutes it would be dark. I pulled over in front of the bar.

There seemed to be nobody around except my gun-toting friend across the street at the gas station. He made a show of watching me as I climbed out of the car. I went into the bar for a beer.

"Still only India and Schaefer?" I asked the bartender.

"Si."

He pulled a Schaefer out of the icebox and pushed it across to me.

"You have a good memory."

"You're easy to remember."

"I like your place a lot better without that damn thing going." I motioned toward the jukebox.

"*Yo también*," he said. "So do I. But most of my customers like music." He switched on the lights and leaned against a shelf behind the bar. "So you're back."

"Yes. I still have some unfinished business here."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"I think so."

"That's more than the police did."

I finished off the beer and got up to leave.

"You were thirsty," he said. "Where are you going now?"

"I thought I'd walk around a bit. I want to take another look at the spot where the shooting took place."

"It's almost dark."

"I have a light."

"What do you expect to find there?"

"Now *you* sound like the private detective," I said.

He almost smiled. I counted that as a victory of sorts in this barrio.

I walked out, took my big lantern flashlight from the car, and started up the road. I walked slowly, out in the street where I'd be conspicuous. The bear in the gas station watched me. I already felt that other people were watching me. In a tight little place like this, people seemed to develop a sixth sense when there were strangers around.

But they hadn't noticed any strangers that day.

The door of Ricardo's house was open, but I didn't see him or his wife or daughter. The woman in the lighted colmado noticed me as I passed. She followed me with her eyes. Just past her store I ran into the juvenile delinquent: he was strolling with his arm wrapped around a bombshell of a girl of about seventeen, the two of them looking like they'd stepped out of *West Side Story*.

"Well, well," I said. "Why aren't you helping your mother with the dishes like a good boy?"

He snarled in his inimitable style. The girl looked me over curiously. She had jet hair and eyes, *café-au-lait* skin, a face and figure to make a man's palms sweat.

"When the hell are you going to leave us alone?" the kid said.

"When I've solved this case," I said amiably. "Which I think I may do this evening. When are you going to change your T-shirt?"

I chin-pointed toward his girl friend. "*Que linda*," I said. "Beautiful girl."

I knew that would do it. The punch came high and fast and I just caught it with my right forearm, holding the flashlight, while I drove my left deep into his stomach. He doubled over and I caught him with another

left, almost straight up from below, and his head snapped back as he went down. I felt pretty good; I hadn't even dropped the flashlight. He was a big kid and I'd known it would take at least two to put him down. The girl crumpled beside him, making little distress noises, punctuated by curses at me. She'd picked up some of his vocabulary. I stepped around the two of them and continued up the road. The kid was holding his stomach and the girl was begging him to tell her he was all right.

Her voice faded behind me as I reached the spot where I surmised the sniper had fired from that day. I turned up several yards into the brush and began poking around in the area. By now it was almost dark and I had to use the light. It cast a good strong beam, very little of which came back on me. I moved a bit farther up the incline and then began working in a circle. The heavy brush came up to my waist and grabbed at my clothes. Quite a few trees of different varieties dotted the slope. Once in a while I bent down as if studying something. It was getting darker every second. As the darkness deepened, I held the light farther out from me.

It would take a little time for him to get into position. Unless I was all wet. I hoped I was. A few minutes more should tell me—us. Anyway I kept on the move, bending over frequently, the light well out from my body. I suppose I've been more scared in my life, but I don't remember when. If they didn't get him first, this might be my last walk on this planet. I didn't see or hear anything unusual, but it was hard to hear much above the din of the insects.

With the falling of darkness it had cooled, but I was still sweating through my light jacket. I'd had to wear the jacket to hide the gun. The hand holding my flashlight was trembling. What the hell was he waiting for? I'd certainly given him time enough by now.

At that instant it came: I heard the report and went down as the bullet sang past my chest. He hadn't shot from very close. I wrenched my revolver out and heard him crashing away through the brush. I also heard the yells of Roberto and his men in pursuit. The chase was taking place on the other side of the road. There was another shot, more running and yelling, and then two more shots. Then there was just the yelling of Roberto's men. They all seemed to have converged at one point about fifteen yards below the road. I walked down, my hands still trembling.

The three of them were gathered over him. He lay, eyes closed, in a pool of light from Roberto's flashlight. My only feeling then was one of

sympathy for him. I didn't see any blood.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"No," Roberto said. "He's passed out—he's not a young man."

"Why did you have to shoot at him?"

"He was shooting at us. Did you want him to get away?"

"I don't know," I said.

Roberto put his brown paw on my shoulder. "He's got one in the back, but I don't think he'll die."

"He's deranged," I said. "You knew that."

"If someone shoots at my men, they have to shoot back," Roberto said. "I'll go call an ambulance."

"I'll wait here with him and your goons," I said. "If you'd found him before he started shooting, this could have been avoided."

"You're the one who's crazy," Mrs. Holling said. "How *could* you use yourself as a decoy?"

"It was the only way I could think of to bring him out into the open. I had no proof, nothing at all. Those people up there certainly weren't going to help me get any."

"They all knew," she said bitterly.

"Maybe not. But it wouldn't have made any difference: it's a tight little community."

"It's so insane," she said. "Just because Jay was driving a red Camaro."

"And for all we know it might not even have been a red Camaro that killed Ricardo's granddaughter," I said. "Perhaps just a car that looked like it."

"How did his wife and daughter take it?"

"They'd half expected something like this. The old man's had a history of mental illness, and he was getting worse. At times he actually believed his granddaughter was still alive. That day he saw your husband's car stop for gas. He ran home and got his hunting rifle and lay in ambush beyond the houses. His wife told me he'd qualified as a marksman in the Army and has hunted all his life."

"Do you think he intended to hit you out there or just scare you?"

"I don't know. I'd like to believe the second."

"And how come the police couldn't find the gun?"

"Guns," I corrected her. "He had three of them, all hidden in a space under his porch."

"It's so sad," Mrs. Holling said. "Now that I know the truth I don't feel any better. I think I regret having hired you."

I didn't say anything.

"Just one more question," she said after a bit. "How did you know that the granddaughter had been killed by a hit-and-run driver?"

"It was just a hunch that seemed to fit. I asked a friend at headquarters to check on any hit-and-runs in the area during the last year. The little girl was killed three months before your husband."

"They'll probably commit him," she said tonelessly.

"Yes," I said. "That's what they usually do."



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LETTERS



I have always enjoyed reading [the] mysteries of crime concocted by authors and committed in the pages of *AHMM*. This month's issue [January 30, 1980] was no exception, [especially] Bill Pronzini's novelette, "Where Have You Gone, Sam Spade?" I will always like his stories of the nameless private detective whose ambition is to solve a crime under the direction of the pulps.

Gary Seiler
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Bill Pronzini has been a freelance writer since 1969 and has published eighteen suspense novels and more than 200 short stories and articles in a variety of fields; he has edited or co-edited nine anthologies of mystery, fantasy, and science fiction, including two for the Mystery Writers of America. In a recent bio he sent me, Bill mentioned that, as far back as he can remember, a writer is the only thing he ever wanted to be.—S.C.G.

A friend says the Alfred Hitchcock caricature at the top right of the title page of every story in *AHMM* was done by Hitchcock himself. True?

Joseph Simon
Brooklyn, New York

True.—S.C.G.

I just finished reading your January [30] issue and enjoyed it very much. I especially enjoyed "Miss Nobody from Nowhere" and "Looking the Other Way."

I do a little writing and was wondering if you could send me a set of writers' guidelines. Enclosed is a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Sherry E. Hohner
Erie, Colorado

We suggest that all readers who wish a set of the guidelines send a self-addressed stamped envelope to speed up the process.—S.C.G.

I was thrilled to read that Alfred Hitchcock was knighted by the Queen of England. It's certainly an honor that was long overdue, and I wanted to use the forum of your Letters column to congratulate Sir Alfred.

Michael Greene
Trenton, New Jersey

The staff of AHMM joins you in your congratulations and good wishes to Sir Alfred Hitchcock.—S.C.G.

For more years than I can remember I have been a reader of your magazine. I am somewhat put out that lately there are fewer stories. From at one time fifteen, the February issue [contained only] 9.

Anita M. Barrigar
Syracuse, New York

We try to print as many stories as possible in each issue, but when we have a novelette or several long stories, we can't print as many as when we have an abundance of shorter fiction in inventory.—S.C.G.

Quite candidly, I think the idea of a "letters" section in *AHMM* is sophomoric! Please, just keep giving your readers quality stories with Ron McCarty's illustrations.

I do have a complaint: those dreadful Gotbaum cover caricatures. The ideas are rather fun, but the drawings are grotesque! Now that he's "Sir Alfred" can't you give the dear man a little dignity?

Jean Fark
Escondido, California

I read your magazine every month. I have a complete 1978 set and from November 1979 on. I'd like to hear from anyone who has some back issues to sell.

Steve Archer
2825 Rosemont
Medford, Oregon 97501

I heard that Alfred Hitchcock once began an address to some party guests by saying, "I'm afraid I have a rather unhappy announcement to make. A botulism has been found in the punch." It's probably an apocryphal story, isn't it?

Annie Knox
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Sir Alfred is reported to have said this some years ago at a ceremony where he presented an award to the French director whose mentor he is, Francois Truffaut.—S.C.G.

In glancing through my January edition, I came across your column. It is very good and I don't know why it wasn't started sooner. I read my magazine the day it comes. I enjoy every line of the stories. The writers and their plots show real imagination. Please keep it up.

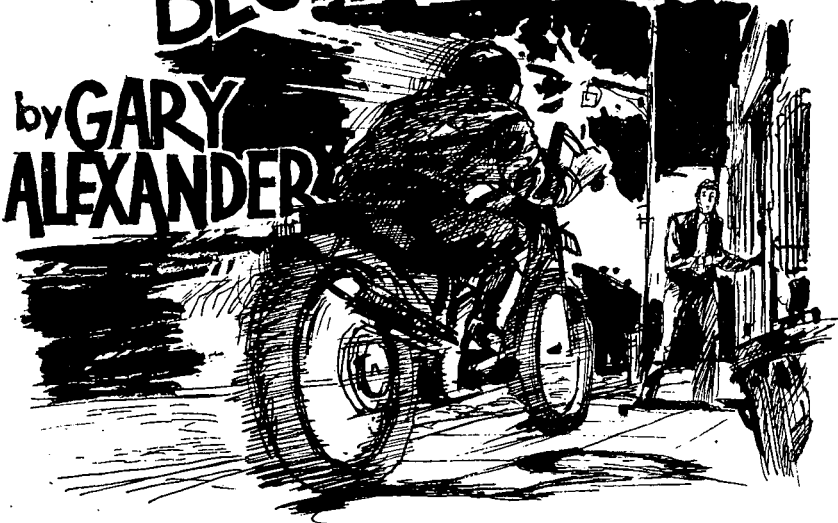
Martha A. Tilges
LaGrange, Illinois

If you too want to share your thoughts about the contents of the magazine, please write to me: Susan Calderella Groarke, Letters' Editor, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The South End belonged to Ziggy . . .

THE BEST DEFENSE

by GARY
ALEXANDER



"More power to you, Harv," Ziggy said after I announced I was resigning to strike out on my own. "This ain't the Mafia or anything where I'm going to give you concrete sneakers instead of a gold watch. I'm just a small businessman, you know, but you've been one helluva right-hand man, so you got my blessing. I just want to make a couple of points about ethics though. Business ethics is very big with me."

I nodded respectfully, reading Ziggy's icy stare through the billows of

foul cigar smoke. I knew his interpretation of ethics would be unequivocal.

"Number one," Ziggy continued, "is the territory. I'm doing just fine with the South End, what with all my loyal customers in the factories and mills buying my football cards every week, plus the off-season action in other sports. With my sidelines, no way do I figure on expanding. You want the West Side, like you say—you got it. You build it up, more power to you. Just never forget who the South End belongs to."

I nodded respectfully again. I was no ninety-seven-pound weakling—I'd even worked as a bouncer for a while, while attending law school—but Ziggy was a gorilla and he had several associates who should have become extinct during the last Ice Age.

"Listen, Ziggy, I wouldn't dream of—"

Ziggy waved his stubby hands, cutting me off. "Lemme finish, Harv. Number two is the cards. You know I got this knack, adjusting the line when I get a hunch. When that TV bookie and the rest of them get burned I usually come up smelling like a rose. I kind of figure I got a copyright, you know. So let's say the consensus is Jets over Buffalo by three and I reverse it. I see your cards coming up that way too—well, I'm going to have to figure you're not so reverent about ethics as me, and I'm going to be deeply hurt, Harv."

Hurting Ziggy would undoubtedly mean a counseling session with his Cro-Magnon colleagues. Despite our long association and friendship, business was business. Before my hiatus in prison I had successfully defended Ziggy on a variety of charges, and he had been grateful. Upon my release, he had given me a nominal position as comptroller of his chain of dry-cleaning stores, a setup so apparently innocent that not even my parole officer was suspicious. In actuality, if I'd had a formal title it would have been Vice-President in charge of Sports Speculation. Except for the writing of the weekly cards, I did it all: organization, finance, and distribution. It had been good for both Ziggy and myself. I had made so much money I lost all interest in petitioning the Bar Association for reinstatement.

But when the craving for entrepreneurship asserts itself one must obey. And Ziggy was right about the West Side—it was a virgin gold mine. But Ziggy's cards were a problem. I had planned on a bit of creative plagiarism. Nothing verbatim, of course, but a fledgling business needs all the help it can get. This was a setback I would have to deal with somehow. I gave Ziggy my word on both ethical points.

We parted with best wishes and hearty handshakes.

In my first week of operation, I stuck to my word—and got killed. Before leaving Ziggy's employ, I'd made arrangements with a number of lunch-wagon drivers who covered the West Side; now, besides coffee and sandwiches, they served my cards. It was just enough volume to earn me a modest profit if all went well, but it would nearly cripple me if it didn't. My product was of the standard format: ten Sunday NFL games were listed and the customer chose any five, selecting either the favorite or the underdog and the points. Three correct paid five to one; four correct, ten to one; all five, twenty to one. The odds were overwhelmingly against the bettor, but few of my clients were statisticians. However, in my maiden run it seemed that every blue-collar Nostradamus in the West Side took Cincinnati and the generous points over highly favored Pittsburgh. Several other upsets were unkind to me also. Ziggy, naturally, made a few adjustments and presumably enjoyed another profitable week.

Since my profession was akin to the insurance business—an aleatory contract, so to speak, where a large pooling of risks diminished the possibility of a catastrophe—I needed to increase my volume, and fast. A handful of lucky longshot artists would finish me off in a week at the present rate.

Thus I acquired the services of one Jackie Osness, my first field distributor. Jackie and I had been roommates at Lompoc, where I had spent ten punitive months for a slight indiscretion concerning a trust fund. Jackie was a weedy little guy with a big mouth who had been caught with his hands in the till of the supermarket chain he worked for. Up to his elbows, I guessed, with little finesse.

I didn't much like Jackie and I trusted him less, but we did become close, sharing common misery and a bitterness about timing and circumstances. It wasn't the incarceration or even my inevitable disbarment that depressed me, but the futility of my gentle crime. Both Jackie and I would be virtually unemployable in our respective fields when we were discharged from Lompoc.

Our contemporaries provided us with grounds for envy. Many were computer thieves, esoteric vampires who drew off at a great profit electronic impulses that belonged to others, and whose technical genius would stand them well in the outside world. Then there were the Watergate-related figures. They kept to themselves, blocking out future best sellers

in their heads; literary agents visited them almost as often as their loved ones did.

Jackie and I shared a bleak future, we thought, and we promised to reestablish contact after we were both released. I had had no real intention of doing so until now, when his offensive mouth—his greatest drawback—became a tool I suddenly needed. He would probably be very successful selling the proverbial Frigidaires in Nome.

I called him, briefed him, and sent him out to hit the bricks at the beginning of my second week. The Vegas line held its own the following Sunday, though hardly spectacularly. I made expenses and a pittance more. I checked and double-checked the receipts and card stubs with Jackie in my small apartment.

"It's just one of those things, Harv. Lots of guys around here are loyal to the Forty-Niners. They'd go with 'em if they was playing God," Jackie said with a shrug.

I glared at my one and only executive, fighting the urge to order him to get his dirty feet off my coffee table. I had anticipated some hanky-panky on his part, for all retail businesses are vulnerable to employee shrinkage. But there are acceptable limits to everything. Honor among thieves. Ethics. I said nothing, instead giving him a stack of next Sunday's cards, double the printing of the preceding.

I'll say this for Jackie—when he puts his mind to it he can do a good day's work. Perhaps he doesn't operate in the Horatio Alger tradition, but he sold every last card, in the process setting up a network of dealers in a plywood mill and several foundries.

We tallied the results together again and they were promising.

"I'm really cooking," he said, his voice rising as it always did when he was excited or poised to brag. "I mean, I'm really opening it up. I probably ought to be a full partner pretty soon, right?"

I felt it unwise to inform Jackie that he was not in my plans for other than his present role. Nor did I tell him that part of our fine effort should be credited to Ziggy, whose cards had inspired three choices of my own. *That* was my problem, a haphazard compromise I had made between greed and fear.

I ignored his assertion and handed him a box of freshly minted cards that had twice the bulk of last week's. "When we become solvent, Jackie," I said, "that will be the time to discuss restructuring the company. Keep up the good work and we'll talk later."

Jackie hefted the box and frowned. "Yeah, well. It's just that a guy wants to be compensated for what he does."

I knew he was, both by our percentage agreement and by his own sticky fingers. I went over and opened the door for him and he waddled out, staggering under the load, red-faced and tight-lipped. I slammed the door behind him, not really giving a damn. Jackie I could handle. But Ziggy?

I whiled away the afternoon making a few calls, doing a little paperwork. The few hours seemed like years, as if I were clinging to the pendulum of a metronome. Surely Ziggy had seen my cards. Surely he would react. But he didn't, though I took no solace in that. The latest edition I had given Jackie also reflected Ziggy's foresight.

I felt a little better after dinner. Ziggy was not one to beat around the bush, yet I hadn't heard from him. I ate at a café on the corner, a block from my apartment, then walked back home. My place is in an old brick building. I took it for its cheapness and lack of ostentation. While my income from Ziggy had been good from the outset, I had the feeling my parole officer might wonder how a disbarred lawyer with marginal prospects could afford a high-rise with a view.

I was fumbling for my key at the front door when a motorcycle bounded onto the sidewalk at high speed, headed directly at me. In the dark, it was a snarling cyclops without friendly intentions. I dove into the doorway alcove at the last possible instant, luckily feeling only its slipstream. It passed in a blur—a chromed monstrosity, its driver a glimpse of hair and leather. I regained my feet and hurried inside.

It might have been chance, but this wouldn't be the first time Ziggy had brought in the biker set as independent contractors. They worked cheap, and while they had a reputation as being notoriously unreliable one look at Ziggy usually made them give him a fair return on his dollar.

I latched my windows, wedged a chair against the doorknob, climbed into bed, and curled up with an unregistered Colt Cobra under my pillow. If the biker had been a warning from Ziggy, it was based on last week's cards. Jackie, by now, had the current edition in circulation and Ziggy, bless his impatient heart, did not like to repeat himself. Needless to say, I didn't sleep worth a damn.

Any rationalization I had developed about the attack being a mere coincidence vaporized the next morning when I walked out to my car.

All four tires were flat and a garbage can was jammed into the opening where the windshield had been.

I thought of the old sportscaster cliché: the best defense is a good offense. I compromised it though. Instead of meeting Ziggy face to face, I called him from a phone booth on the other side of town. I recanted, promising that the sin would not be repeated.

Ziggy responded with thunderous laughter. "Me? Hell, no. I knew you'd fudge a little on me, Harv. I guess, after thinking it over, you're entitled, so long as you don't overdo it. You been real good about staying out of the South End and that's all I really care about."

I thanked him, apologizing for accusing him of such tackiness, and hung up. Ziggy had always been straight with me but, still, business was business. I tried to shunt the insecurity from my mind that day with hard work, servicing accounts and soliciting new ones in parts of the West Side I hadn't assigned to Jackie. When I returned home late in my rental car, I noticed three large cycles parked in front of the tavern up the street. Odd. The bar was a dingy, quiet place, catering to the numerous pensioners in the neighborhood. I circled the block and cruised up the alley. My apartment is on the third floor, rear; a light was on.

Evidently Ziggy had had his fingers crossed when we talked earlier. I was again faced with the "best defense" homily. They wouldn't recognize my rental car, but surely someone would be watching for me. I entered quickly, charging up the stairs to the second floor, where I hid inside an unlocked utility closet next to the stairwell and waited. I assumed that one or more of my guests would come down to investigate when I didn't show, and since the elevator had been inoperative for eons this was the only possible route. I hoped they'd send just one scout.

Wishes, I learned, do sometimes come true. Peeking through a crack in the door, I watched as a scruffy fireplug of a biker lumbered by. I stepped out.

"Excuse me," I said.

Nureyev would have shuddered at his pirouette. And at his highly unartistic, gap-toothed expression. He grunted and came at me. He was my weight perhaps, but a lot shorter. I could have handled him in a fair fight since, like I said, I am no runt, but we weren't under the jurisdiction of the State Boxing Commission. His ponderous gut was a great target. My kick would have been forty-five yards, straight through the uprights.

He doubled over with a wheeze and a soft moan. I dragged him into

the closet to take a deposition. I pulled on the light cord and gave him a moment to recover.

"How much is Ziggy paying you?" I asked.

He sat on a mop bucket, his hands covering his eyes, and didn't reply. I lifted him to his feet. It's amazing how light a man becomes when you utilize the larynx as a handle.

"For the record, please, how much is Ziggy paying you?"

"I don't know no Ziggy. We just want our three hundred dollars."

I squeezed tighter. "I beg your pardon?"

He sucked a breath to the floor of his chest. "Your flunky—what's-his-name. The skinny guy."

"Jackie?"

"Yeah. Hey, you gonna let loose of my neck?"

I released just enough pressure to improve his enunciation. "Not at this point in time. Please elaborate on Jackie."

"We were at this bar we always go to a couple of weeks ago. Your guy Jackie comes in and sells us these football cards. A real motor-mouth he is. Anyway, we been drinking and we wrote out some real bad picks."

"The Pittsburgh-Cincinnati game?"

"Yeah, how'd you know? Some other real dogs too. But they came through for us. Jackie said he'd be back in a week to settle up, but he wasn't. Lizard and Scab both hit all five. I got three myself. We were pretty damn bent outa shape!"

"I can understand that."

"Finally this guy we know who works down at the tool-and-die spotted him. He got a regular route. So we met up with him outside the gate. He said his boss wouldn't pay off. Said he would to his weekly trade—the working stiffs. He said that if you ride and wear the colors, tough cookies. He was trying, but he couldn't get you to come across. He said he didn't like it at all, but you were the boss. He gave us your name and address and said we oughta come over and make a direct collection. We tried to scare you into paying off first, because we don't like to do things the hard way."

"I noticed that."

"Even after we trashed your car, Jackie called us up at Scab's place this afternoon and told us that you weren't going to come through. He said you were deadwood and you were cheating everyone, including him—you were getting ready to blow town with your bundle. He said

to do what we wanted and get it if we could, any way we could—starting next week he was taking over and we'd get a fair shake after we squared you away."

The scenario was obvious. I was very disappointed with Jackie. I'd expected him to steal from me but not from the clientele. Historically, in the gaming profession, one doesn't arbitrarily refuse to honor debts. Without your integrity you have nothing.

I reached into my wallet—my bank, which the IRS and the police couldn't audit by traditional methods—and gave the biker his \$300, and \$200 more.

"General damages," I said.

"Huh?"

"For your pain and suffering and inconvenience."

He rubbed his neck, grinning. "Yeah. O.K."

I gave him Jackie's address, his route for tomorrow, and another hundred. I explained that as of this instant Jackie was no longer on my payroll and that he and his peers were well qualified to conduct a seminar with Jackie on contemporary morality—this evening, if they wished.

The biker was mesmerized by the wad of bills in his hand. I regarded his lopsided grin as a binding contract. As a fail-safe device, I asked him again if he knew Ziggy, describing my former employer too.

He turned pale. "Him? Yeah, we did some work for him some time back. Kind of cranky, he was."

I assured him that Ziggy's gruffness was not a true indication of his character. However, Ziggy was due in my apartment in a few minutes to discuss an impending merger. Best that the biker and his friends be gone when he arrived. Nothing personal, but if Ziggy wished an audience we would have made arrangements for the Rose Bowl.

The biker caught the drift and vanished into the sunset, which happened to be the greasy fifty-watter hanging bare in the stairwell. I enjoyed a leisurely cigarette and trudged to my apartment. It was vacant and immaculate. An odd thing about stereotypes; these bikers were really quite tidy.

I poured a Scotch, put up my feet on the coffee table, and contemplated my future. Perhaps my allusion to Ziggy was not a complete lie. Perhaps he would be receptive. The embryo of a conglomerate? Perhaps I'd call him.

And Jackie? A simple matter of ethics.

When the Hon. Con set her mind to detection, the police raced for cover . . .

THE MSTRY OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT



by
JOYCE PORTER

“**W**hy on earth can’t you do as you’re told, you *infuriating* little woman?”

Magdalena Turnbull’s enunciation was perfect. Even if the Honorable Constance Morrison-Burke, down at the far end of the Masonic Hall, had not been blessed with the hearing of a lynx, she would have caught every exasperated word and insulting nuance.

The Honorable Constance Morrison-Burke was standing on top of a stepladder—fortunately, the word “vertigo” had no place in her vocab-

ulary—fastening swaths of blue bunting 'round a large and flattering photograph of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher. She had already completed the companion piece—red, white, and blue bunting 'round a somewhat larger portrait of Her Majesty, the Queen—on the opposite wall. When Magdalena Turnbull's ringing tones had died away and the specks of dust had stopped jiggling nervously in the shafts of sunlight streaming down from the windows, the Honorable Constance clambered down from her perch. Swinging her hammer nonchalantly in her hand, she strolled down the hall toward the scene of this latest spot of trouble.

Apart from the main protagonists, there were half a dozen other people in the hall. Each and every one of them was a member in good standing of the Totterbridge & District Conservative Party and so, automatically, if not *sans peur* then certainly *sans reproche*. Their idle chatter died away as the Hon. Con (everybody called our heroine this, though not to her face) progressed toward them with heavy and deliberate tread. The mood of the onlookers was partly apprehensive and partly hopeful. The Hon. Con could be terrible when roused, of course, but it would be marvelous to see Magdalena Turnbull get her comeuppance for once. Everybody appreciated that being chairperson of the subcommittee entrusted with the running of the Totterbridge & District Conservative Party's Autumn Fayre was a nerve-shredding and thankless task. But did one have to be quite so devastatingly rude and bossy about it? Talk about Captain Bligh on the quarterdeck!

The Hon. Con finally reached her goal. She paused only to spit out a couple of tacks she had inadvertently retained in her mouth. It was so effective a gesture that even Magdalena Turnbull was momentarily taken aback.

"Something up, Mags?" inquired the Hon. Con with dangerous calm.

Magdalena Turnbull took a deep breath and reminded herself not to get upset. It was her heart. Everybody knew she was a martyr to angina pectoris and you would have thought there would have been some effort to spare her any unnecessary harassment and stress, but oh, no!—she got landed with the lot. Every petty problem, every tantrum, every upset, every—

"I'm afraid it's all my fault, Constance dear."

Miss Jones, standing meekly by the white-elephant stall, was one of Nature's victims. She was endowed with neither wit nor beauty, neither wealth nor social standing—which is more or less why Mrs. Turnbull had

picked on her in the first place. But Miss Jones did have one advantage over the rest. She was the Hon. Con's very special chum.

It would be gratifying to be able to define what being the Hon. Con's "very special chum" actually involved and, indeed, the denizens of Totterbridge had been speculating avidly on the subject for many a long year. The Hon. Con and Miss Jones certainly lived in the same house—a bijou residence in Upper Waxwing Drive—but on what terms nobody was quite sure. The Hon. Con seemed to pay all the bills and Miss Jones seemed to do all the work. But were they mistress and maid or just good friends? What could the bond be between the boisterous daughter of an earl and the downtrodden only child of an impoverished Church of England vicar?

The Hon. Con grinned encouragingly at Miss Jones. "Your fault, Bones, old bean? I doubt that." She directed her inquiring back to Magdalena Turnbull.

Mrs. Turnbull was ready for her. "You may recall, Constance," she began icily, "that at our very first committee meeting I laid down the rule that no item which had been donated for sale at the Fayre was to be sold, or even put to one side for somebody, before the Fayre was opened to the general public." She appealed to the group of helpers who had abandoned their preparations and were now gathered around to watch the fun. "Everybody knows it's a point upon which I happen to feel very strongly. All these things—" she swept an arm toward the piles of home-made goodies and heaps of assorted junk—"were given to us on the strict understanding that they would be offered for sale to our supporters at large and not parcelled out among the privileged few who are lucky enough to be manning the stalls and running the raffles."

The Hon. Con nodded to acknowledge the veracity of this eloquent declaration. "Trouble is, Mags," she pointed out, "you're always laying down the jolly old law about something. Chaps tend to get a bit confused."

"I doubt if anybody is confused about my ruling that nothing is to be sold from any stall until the Fayre is officially opened this afternoon!" snapped Mrs. Turnbull.

Miss Jones clasped her gloved hands (isn't it funny how very dirty white elephants always are?) in an imploring gesture. "But I *didn't* sell your Chinese biscuit barrel, Mrs. Turnbull. Truly I didn't!"

"Then where is it, Miss Jones? And I thought we had agreed to call it a Japanese tobacco jar."

Chinese biscuit barrel or Japanese tobacco jar—it made no difference. Miss Jones sagged. She had no answer.

Mrs. Turnbull gave a triumphant sniff and addressed her next remarks to the Hon. Con. “I personally, Constance, brought this jar or barrel or whatever-it-is along to the hall this morning and placed it right here on this stall not twenty minutes ago. It is now no longer here.”

“Pr’aps,” said the Hon. Con, who had a wonderfully practical mind, “it’s slipped down somewhere amongst the rest of the rubbish?”

Miss Jones shook her head. “We’ve already searched thoroughly, dear. And the neighboring stalls too.” She indicated the Nearly New Boutique on one side and Bottles, Bags & Bones on the other. “It isn’t anywhere and it’s really too big to have got swept away accidentally.”

“Oh, so you do actually remember it, do you, Bones?” The Hon. Con had been hoping to write the whole thing off as a figment of La Turnbull’s febrile imagination.

“Oh, yes, dear! It was about six inches high and three or four inches across, I suppose. And it sort of bulged out in the middle.” Miss Jones’s hands fluttered as she sketched the shape in the air. “And it had a lid too—didn’t it, Mrs. Turnbull?”

The Hon. Con’s eyes narrowed as she tried to picture the thing in her mind. “Made of wood, was it?”

“Oh, no, it was porcelain, dear. A sort of blue with lovely Chinese designs painted on it. Or Japanese, I suppose. It was sweetly pretty and I can quite understand,” said Miss Jones, making a genuine effort to love her neighbor, “why Mrs. Turnbull is so upset about its disappearance.”

If that was an olive branch, Magdalena Turnbull trampled it into the dust. “It was quite the most hideous object I have ever laid eyes on,” she proclaimed crushingly. “I’ve been trying to get rid of it for years. It’s my husband’s actually,” she explained in an aside to the band of helpers. She gave a silvery laugh. “I shouldn’t like anybody to think that such an appallingly ghastly thing belonged to *me*!”

The band of helpers murmured something faintly sycophantic.

“It was a present,” Magdalena Turnbull went on, clearly anxious to excuse even her husband’s apparent lack of taste. “His sister brought it back from that cruise they took her on just before she died. Well, I know he was fond of her, but ten years is enough for anybody, surely. It makes me wince with real pain every time I go into his dressing room—well, you know what a fine eye I have for beautiful things. And, of course, no

housemaid we've ever had has ever so much as chipped the dreadful thing. However, when I got back from Scotland last week I decided, enough's enough."

"Doesn't your husband mind you giving it away?" asked young Mrs. Cloudsdale, the only one present naive enough to imagine that Duggie Turnbull's feelings played any part in the matter.

"He's had to go to Brussels for a couple of days," explained Magdalena Turnbull with the supreme confidence of one who knows she can take any *post-factum* recriminations in her stride.

Unlike young Mrs. Cloudsdale, the Hon. Con didn't need any lessons on how to handle a husband. "We still haven't solved the mystery of this vanishing Oriental pot," she reminded everybody.

"There's no mystery, Constance." Magdalena Turnbull had had her say and was now prepared to cut her losses. She had a million other things to see to if the Autumn Fayre was to be ready to open at two o'clock and she had schooled herself long ago not to shed too many tears over the inability of the lower classes to do what they were told. "Your little—er—friend—here has sold it. All we can do now is make sure that she is never put in a position of trust again."

Miss Jones fell back, her trembling hands stifling the cry of anguish which sprang to her lips. She had only been allowed into the charmed circle of those permitted to organize the Conservative Party's Autumn Fayre as a kind of substitute for the Hon. Con. Miss Jones's place in the Totterbridge pecking order was far too lowly for her to qualify in her own right. Luckily there were some activities at which the Hon. Con didn't shine with her usual hundred and fifty percent. Give her a saw and a few nails and ask her to turn a couple of tea chests into a china cabinet and she was, of course, just your man. When it came to making an artistic display out of secondhand chiffon blouses and jars of Stilton cheese, however, she was somehow less effective—and that was where Miss Jones came in. What she couldn't do with a trestle table full of old trash was nobody's business.

But the Hon. Con was girding herself for battle. She hitched up her trousers and stuck out her jaw. "Hold your horses, Mags," she advised gruffly. "In this fair country of ours everybody is accounted innocent until proved guilty. Right?"

"I'm afraid I haven't time to discuss the English judicial system with you just at the moment, Constance," said Magdalena Turnbull with a fine

touch of irony that went clean over the Hon. Con's head. "The facts are quite clear. I myself placed the jar thing right here on the stall." She indicated the precise spot, between a pair of ebony glove stretchers and a cardboard box of electric plugs, *circa* 1937. "It is not here now. I am not suggesting that Miss Jones actually purloined the article—"

"I should jolly well think not!"

"—but merely that she let somebody have it as a favor. I don't even blame her, really. I blame whoever it was who exploited his or her superior social position and prestige to corrupt poor Miss Jones in the first place."

The Hon. Con swallowed hard and flexed a few muscles but before she could think up some real steamroller of an answer Miss Jones sprang hysterically to her own defense.

"But it's just not true, Mrs. Turnbull! I haven't even touched your jar, much less sold it to anybody! I happen to feel quite strongly myself that it is morally wrong to let the helpers buy up all the best things before a bazaar is open to the public."

"I'd hardly call that appalling pot one of the best things!" said Magdalena Turnbull with the assured laugh of one who has attended evening classes in both creative pottery and the appreciation of art. "But if you didn't dispose of it, where is it?"

Miss Jones gazed round irresolutely. "I don't know. There's been such a lot of coming and going all morning and all my attention has been concentrated on that collection of ashtrays Mr. Wilberforce gave us. Anybody could have just—well—picked the jar up and walked away with it."

There were murmurs of protest from the spectators. "Well, not anybody, exactly," said Archie Orr, who prided himself on being able to think laterally. "We're the only people here. And I must say," he added, voicing the general sentiment, "that I do rather object to being accused of theft."

"Oh, I'm sure Miss Jones didn't mean to imply that—exactly," cooed Magdalena Turnbull, generously pouring oil on the fire.

"Didn't she?" queried Mrs. Pinchbeck, who was young Mrs. Cloudsdale's mother. "Well, that's what it sounded like to me."

"And to me!" came other mutters in a ragged chorus.

The Hon. Con decided that she had let others hog the limelight long enough. "It shouldn't," she announced, stuffing her hammer down the

waistbelt of her trousers, "be too difficult to get to the bottom of this."

The murmurs of resentment turned into squeaks of apprehension. Everybody there knew of the Hon. Con's gift for transforming even the most innocuous situation into a howling chaos and each of them had his or her favorite horror story. Flo Goddard recalled the time when the Hon. Con, temporarily in charge of the Annual Choir Outing, had dispatched ten eager little boys out of the rain into a sex and rubber goods emporium where the afternoon film show was just starting. Mrs. Orr remembered the Hon. Con's famous lecture on euthanasia given to the Over-Sixties Club and Louisa Loretta Joplin would never forget the whist drive at which the Hon. Con—thanks to an inadequate grasp of the rules of the game—had accused a visiting suffragan bishop and his wife of cheating.

All these incidents had taken place, of course, before the Hon. Con had decided to become a private detective. Since then, things had been very different. Now it was generally the local police force who went reeling and racing for cover. Not that the Hon. Con's efforts hadn't frequently been crowned with success. She'd got her man (in the strictly non-marital sense of the word) on several occasions and had chalked up an impressive number of convictions. Mostly the police just bound her over to keep the peace for hindering them in the execution of their duties, but one particular bench of magistrates (highly prejudiced, because they all happened to know her personally) had given her seven days for disorderly conduct.

The prospect of having the Hon. Con playing detective when the opening of the Totterbridge & District Conservative Party Autumn Fayre was less than three hours away spurred Magdalena Turnbull to action. Her husband's Japanese tobacco jar wasn't, she declared, worth losing any sleep over. The other helpers wholeheartedly supported this point of view and Louisa Loretta Joplin even proposed they take up a collection amongst themselves so that party funds shouldn't suffer—fifty pence a head, perhaps.

The Hon. Con turned a deaf ear. "I'll have this cleared up in two shakes of a lamb's tail," she boasted and nodded masterfully toward an already cringing Miss Jones. "You'll take notes as per usual, old bean?"

Miss Jones's bleat that she had neither pen nor paper cut little ice. The Hon. Con had the gleam of battle in her eye and the bit between her teeth.

Totterbridge's own shamus addressed the troops. "First thing, chaps—have we had any strangers hanging around in here this morning? I can't say I've spotted anybody myself, and I'm pretty observant."

"Mr. Sneade would know, wouldn't he?" asked Mrs. Orr. She was referring to the geriatric case who, man and old-age pensioner, collected the entrance money for the Autumn Fayre. It was a job he made slightly more difficult than was strictly necessary by still doing all his calculations in shillings, florins, and half crowns. "He's tried to sell me a ticket every single time I've come in from the car park."

The Hon. Con didn't really want any helpful suggestions. "Old Sneade wouldn't notice if King Kong and the Loch Ness monster marched in, paw in flipper!" she quipped. "However, I'm pretty satisfied we've had no suspicious outsiders-snooping about."

Magdalena Turnbull pointedly consulted her diamond-encrusted watch. "Will you get a move on, Constance?"

The Hon. Con refused to be ruffled. "Just laying out my parameters, Mags," she explained, and hurried on before any interfering idiot could ask her what *that* meant. "Now, I want you lot to stay exactly where you are while I search the hall. I doubt if I'll find any clues, but it's a routine job that's got to be done."

"Wouldn't it be quicker if we all searched?" asked Mr. Orr.

The Hon. Con was vastly amused at such innocence. "You can't have the suspects searching, old cheese!" she pointed out. "Pr'aps I've been going a touch too fast for you. Since I've established that there haven't been any strangers in the hall, this Oriental pot thing must have been pinched by one of you. You're all suspects."

Young Mrs. Cloudsdale's eyes widened. "But aren't you a suspect too, Miss Morrison-Burke? You could have taken the thing as easily as anybody, couldn't you? Easier, really—because you could count on Miss Jones covering up for you."

The Hon. Con scowled. You always got these blooming amateurs trying to muscle in! "Don't be so wet, Viv, old fruit!" The lass was as pretty as a picture, of course, but solid bone between those charming little ears.

Magdalena Turnbull was on the Hon. Con's side. Since there was now no hope of stopping Totterbridge's premier private detective, the only thing to do was get it over with as quickly as possible. Mrs. Turnbull therefore stamped on young Mrs. Cloudsdale's flicker of revolt and the Hon. Con conducted the search of the hall by herself.

Parsimony was the middle name of the Totterbridge & District Conservative Party and so they had hired no more than the bare minimum of accommodation from the Masons for the Autumn Fayre. All that the Hon. Con had to subject to her minute and methodical scrutiny was the main hall itself—lofty, bare, dusty—and just big enough for a couple of badminton courts, the little entrance hall in which Mr. Sneade was already sitting clutching his tickets, and two very smelly cloakrooms. The search took some time, however, as the Hon. Con had to examine the contents of every stall—most of which had by now been completely set out—and sort through all the straw cardboard boxes, and old newspapers which littered the floor.

“Clean as a whistle!” she reported at long last, wiping her filthy hands as clean as she could on her trousers. “I had high hopes of the cistern in the gents’ loo but it was not to be. I did find an unopened packet of potato crisps in there, but no Oriental pitcher.”

“In that case,” said Mrs. Turnbull with a briskness that verged on the exasperated, “we’d better go out and do the car park.”

The Hon. Con’s face fell with a thud. Gesticulating Jeremiah, who was supposed to be the blooming defective ’round here? “I was just about to suggest that!” she bawled as she sped off in Magdalena Turnbull’s wake. “It’s pretty obvious, really. Whoever nicked the pot off the white-elephant stall could easily have bundled it up in some of that discarded packing stuff and carried it out quite naturally to their car. Everybody’s been buzzing in and out all morning, bringing the junk in, unwrapping it, and carting the odd cardboard box or what-have-you back to the cars again.”

“Precisely!” said Magdalena Turnbull over her shoulder.

The other helpers, with Miss Jones meekly bringing up the rear, trooped out to the car park too. Their attitude toward this whole business was hardening and they handed their car keys over in a mulish silence which boded no good to anybody.

The Hon. Con surveyed the cars, all of which had been parked as close as possible to the entrance of the Masonic Hall. Only Miss Jones appreciated that the supersleuth wasn’t actually searching for vital clues or making any startling deductions.

Miss Jones tripped across to the rescue. “Can I help, dear?”

The Hon. Con glared moodily at her chum. “I’ve forgotten which blooming key opens which blooming car,” she growled, and handed the entire bunch over to Miss Jones. “I suppose we can leave our mini and

old Mags's Rolls to the last." The Hon. Con sighed. "I wish I could afford a blooming Rolls-Royce," she whined, resolutely blocking out the knowledge that she could have bought a couple if she'd wanted to. "Must be nice," she added, in what must have been the most implausible observation of the week, "to have a rich husband to pay all the bills."

Miss Jones would never have made a criminal investigator of the Hon. Con's caliber if she'd tried from now till Kingdom Come, but she was something of a dab hand when it came to snapping up unconsidered trifles of local gossip. She put the Hon. Con right. "It's Mrs. Turnbull's money, actually, dear," she whispered. "She was a Lapierre, you know. Mr. Turnbull didn't have a penny to his name when they married and it wasn't until her father gave him a job in the family firm that—"

The Hon. Con removed a key from Miss Jones's fingers. The way old Bones went rattling on, you could spend all day at it. "Whose is this one?"

"That's young Mrs. Cloudsdale's station wagon, dear. I recognize the key ring. It's a sort of plastic fried egg, isn't it? So quaint!"

The Cloudsdale station wagon yielded nothing of interest, if you didn't count the large plastic bag full of dirty nappies which were en route to the launderette. The Hon. Con had forgotten about young Mrs. Cloudsdale's five-month-old twins but once she'd given her hands a good scrub she determined not to let a little setback like that put her off.

Louisa Loretta Joplin was a divorcée in her early thirties who was reputed to lead a rather rakish life and certainly ran a rather rakish MG. The car was old and battered but it made everybody who drove a brand-new expensive saloon feel dowdy and out-of-date. It was the same with practically everything Louisa Loretta Joplin had or did. She had only to come strolling into view for every other woman in Totterbridge (with the notable exception of the Hon. Con) to become painfully aware that she was overweight, overdressed, and undersexed.

The Hon. Con found searching the back seat of the sports car extremely difficult but, after a great deal of huffing and puffing, she managed it, at least to her own satisfaction. There was nothing there, of course, and it was only when she moved 'round to the back of the car to have a look in the boot that she struck gold.

There, carelessly wrapped in newspaper and nestling next to a bundle of homemade potpourri sachets, lay Magdalena Turnbull's missing tobacco jar. Or biscuit barrel.

There was a gratifying gasp of surprise all around.

The Hon. Con savored her moment of triumph. She held the pot up high—it was bigger and gaudier than she had expected—and turned to Miss Jones. “This it, Bones?”

Miss Jones nodded. “Oh, Constance,” she breathed, “aren’t you marvelous!”

But Magdalena Turnbull was already surging forward. She snatched the jar out of the Hon. Con’s grasp and swung reproachfully on Louisa Joplin. “*You, Louisa Loretta!*” she cried dramatically. “*You, of all people!* But why?”

It was a question everybody wanted to hear answered.

Louisa Loretta Joplin hesitated.

“You can’t,” Magdalena Turnbull went resonantly on, “have wanted a horror like this for yourself—not with your exquisite taste. And, in any case, why didn’t you just buy it? I wasn’t going to price it at more than fifty pence.”

Louisa Loretta Joplin steeled herself. “I shan’t be able to get along to the Fayre this afternoon until nearly six,” she said carelessly. “I was afraid it would be sold by then and that I’d miss it.”

“But all you had to do was tell me you wanted it, dear, and I’d have put it to one side for you.”

If the irony of this remark struck Louisa Loretta Joplin, she didn’t comment on it. “That would have spoiled the surprise,” she said.

“The surprise, dear?”

Louisa Loretta Joplin squeezed out a smile. “Well, since Constance here has managed to ruin everything, I suppose I might as well tell you. I wanted the jar as a birthday present for you, Magdalena. As a joke.”

Magdalena Turnbull knew she had no sense of humor and so was inclined to overreact. “A joke!” she screamed, in apparent delight. “Oh, Louisa Loretta, how *could* you? I’d have died, I really would! Fancy opening up all one’s presents at the breakfast table and finding this monstrosity! And with Duggie sitting there too! Oh, you wicked, *wicked* girl!”

Everybody went limp with relief. Thank goodness that particular bit of unpleasantness was over, and no bones broken! And what an amusing denouement! Of course, everybody knew what a dreadful tease Louisa Loretta was.

The Hon. Con was grim-faced. She attempted to draw Mrs. Turnbull to one side. “You’re not going to swallow that cock-and-bull story, are

you, Mags? She's made it up! I can tell from the look on her face that she's made it all up."

"Oh, don't be silly, Constance!" Magdalena Turnbull was totally unburdened by any sense of obligation to those who had served her so faithfully. "You're just being petty because it hasn't ended in a murder or something equally ludicrous. Now, come along, everybody, back to work! We've wasted quite enough time!"

"But you're not just going to let it rest there, are you, Magdalena?" asked Archie Orr, who liked his bit of fun. "You can't just stick the jar back on the white-elephant stall after all this."

"Well, I'm certainly not going to take it home again!" laughed Mrs. Turnbull.

"If I were you, I'd give it to Louisa Loretta, just to serve her right."

"What a wonderful idea, Archie!" Predictably, however, Magdalena Turnbull had a better one. "But not give it—*sell* it! Come along, Louisa Loretta! This is going to cost you fifty pence for party funds!"

Louisa Loretta Joplin emitted a series of yelps of protest but she was already getting her purse out and the Japanese tobacco jar would have been simply handed back to her if the Hon. Con had not rushed in.

She grabbed the jar and hugged it to her chest. "Since when, Mags," she demanded breathlessly, drawing on her own vast experience and playing a hunch, "has Louisa Loretta been in the habit of giving you a birthday present?"

It was a master stroke. Totterbridge's upper crust hated throwing its money around. Birthday presents were traditionally restricted to the family circle and a very few best friends; everybody else got cards, if they were lucky.

Magdalena Turnbull cut through the confused gabble that was coming from an ashen Mrs. Joplin by way of explanation. "But if she didn't want it as a present for me, Constance, why *did* she steal it? She can hardly have wanted such a dreadful-looking thing for herself."

"Precisely!" said the Hon. Con, gratified that Magdalena Turnbull was showing a bit of sense at last. "So let's concede that Louisa Loretta didn't want your jar thing either for your birthday or for her own delectation." Since everybody was now listening to her open-mouthed, the Hon. Con succumbed to the temptation to show off. "*Ergo*, that leads us inexorably to the conclusion that, if she didn't want the tobacco jar *per se*, she might have wanted what's in it."

"What's in it?" Magdalena Turnbull's eyes narrowed.

It was a good thing the Hon. Con had wrists of steel because the lid on the jar was quite a tight fit and an undignified struggle would have detracted from the drama of the situation. She wrenched the lid off and thrust her hand fearlessly into the wide neck of the jar. With a grin of triumph she pulled out a small, untidy bundle of silky black cloth.

"Oh, Constance dear!" murmured Miss Jones, feeling almost overcome with admiration.

The onlookers edged closer.

"Give that to me, Constance!" commanded Mrs. Turnbull.

Some hope! The Hon. Con passed the jar to Miss Jones for safe keeping and began to unwrap the bundle. She held the silky black material up. It was a pair of panties—skimpy, seductive, edged with lace, and emblazoned in white with the initials L. L. J.

"Cor!" said Mr. Orr hoarsely.

"These must be yours, Louisa Loretta!" drawled the Hon. Con and tossed the panties over.

Louisa Loretta Joplin's response was far from ladylike. "You bloody interfering old cow!"

"And this," the Hon. Con went on, holding up a small screw-top bottle, "was also in the jar. Those knicker things were wrapped 'round it, presumably to stop it rattling about. Any suggestions?"

"It looks like a bottle of aspirins," said Mrs. Pinchbeck.

"But you don't have bright yellow aspirins, do you?" objected Flo Goddard, whose eyesight was notoriously good. "Tip them out, Constance—they may have a maker's name or something stamped on them."

"There's no need to bother." Magdalena Turnbull had drawn herself up to her full height and was breathing heavily. "I happen to know exactly what they are. They're dipyridamole. I have them for my angina."

Little Mrs. Cloudsdale's mouth opened, then closed again.

"Without these pills," Magdalena Turnbull went icily on, "an attack could well prove fatal to me. I did wonder why my last supply looked so markedly different in both shape and color from what I had had before. My husband, Duggie," she added grimly, "very kindly fetched the prescription from the chemist's for me."

The Hon. Con got the whole picture in one blinding flash. Holy smoke—this was a case of attempted murder! Duggie Turnbull could only have replaced his wife's proper pills with some absolutely useless ones

in the hope that when she had her next heart attack it would kill her. It was the only explanation that fitted all the facts. No doubt after Magdalena was safely dead, good old Duggie would have quietly filled up her pill bottle with the right tablets again and no one would have been any the wiser. But what about Louisa Loretta Joplin's black-silk panties?

What indeed?

Well, every murder had to have a motive, and this one had at least two. One would be Magdalena Turnbull's money and the other would be Louisa Loretta Joplin—Duggie Turnbull's paramour.

Paramour?

The Hon. Con wasn't one to mince words. And what else could you call her? Apart from accomplice, of course. The Japanese tobacco jar had stood in Duggie Turnbull's dressing room. He needed a safe place in which to hide the real heart pills until after his wife's death—and what better place than in the tobacco jar? And, just in case somebody moved the jar and heard something rattling about inside, the bottle of pills had been wrapped in Louisa Loretta Joplin's black-silk unmentionables.

Well, we're all men of the world, and there's no need for diagrams. A decent veil can be drawn over what Louisa Loretta Joplin was doing in Duggie Turnbull's dressing room without her knickers on. The Hon. Con would have a word in private with Magdalena Turnbull later about these sordid little details. Meantime, she would just sketch in the bare bones of her investigation for the edification of the assembled company and receive their congratulations.

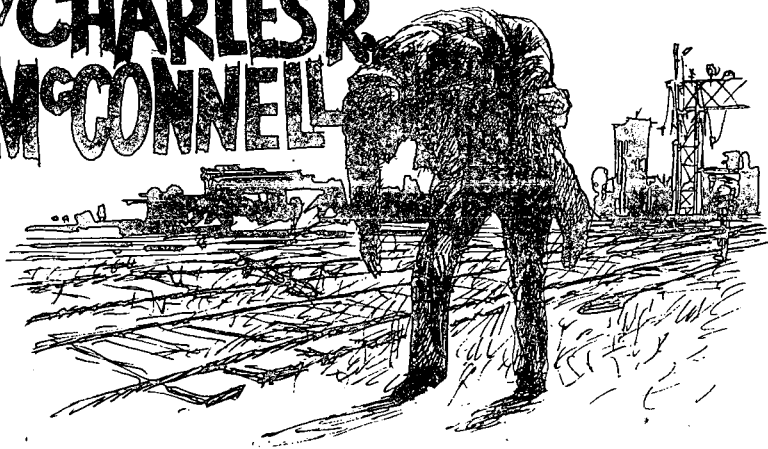
But the Hon. Con had missed the boat. A few scales had been falling from Magdalena Turnbull's eyes and she was intent on making up for lost time. The implications of the dipyridamole pills, the habitual location of the Japanese tobacco jar, Louisa Loretta Joplin's black-silk panties, and several other things as well—all were now just as clear to her as they were to the Hon. Con. With a shriek of unbridled fury and a total disregard for her weak heart, she tore the tobacco jar out of Miss Jones's hands and smashed it over Louisa Loretta Joplin's head.

"You dirty, sneaking husband snatcher!" she screamed. "I'll teach you to try and get rid of me, you disgusting little tart!" She began to kick Louisa Loretta Joplin as the latter sank, somewhat stunned, to the ground. "And this is nothing to what I'll bloody well do to Duggie when I get my hands on him!"

Which of them had first considered killing Caleb? . . .

KILLING CALEB

by CHARLES R.
McCONNELL



The last thing Caleb Wick saw in this life was a dark shape springing from the brush at the top of the ridge. A shadowy extension arced out of the shape and struck him across the eyebrows with pile-driving force. Caleb fell dead, the front of his skull crushed. Considering the darkness, the swiftness of the attack, and his state of drunkenness, it is doubtful that Caleb recognized his killer as his house guest and frequent drinking companion, Elmer Brogan.

Elmer rested the baseball bat on the ground. Caleb had fallen on his back partway down the short slope. His sightless eyes bulged at the night sky, and even in the darkness Elmer could see that the bat had served its purpose well. He was pleased. He hadn't wanted to hit Caleb more than once.

Elmer laid the bat on the trodden earth of the path. "Well, that's done," he muttered. He bent and gripped Wick's ankles. "Come on, old buddy, we got to get you moved. Now the real work starts."

He wasn't conscious of speaking aloud. He had developed the habit of conversing with himself sometime during his solitary years.

He dragged the body onto level ground, then released his grip. He pulled a half-pint bottle from his hip pocket and downed the remaining inch of whiskey. He caught himself short of pitching the bottle into the brush, capped it, and returned it to his pocket.

Elmer surveyed the path in both directions as far as his vision would carry. With the toe of his shoe he spread Caleb's feet apart. He tucked the ball bat under one arm, positioned himself between the feet facing away from the body, and began to pull.

He stopped in less than a yard.

"Damn. What's your back going to look like if I drag you? I guess Lil didn't think of that! 'Just drag him to the third or fourth track, honey,' she says. She ought to know anything I do's got to look like a train did it."

Elmer turned the body over, squatted, and heaved the dead man up onto his right shoulder. Overweight and long out of shape, he grunted with the effort as he retrieved the bat and started along the path with short, labored steps. With each step Caleb's right foot bounced off Elmer's thigh and a lifeless hand slapped rhythmically against his backside.

He murmured, "'Third or fourth track,' she says, 'the ones with the most trains.' That's got to be—what? a quarter mile?"

It was all of a quarter mile to the third of the seven railroad tracks cut by the worn footpath running from the dives of Harborside to the Milltown shacks. There had been twice as many tracks when Elmer was young. Now nothing was left of some of them but weed-covered track beds and a few rotting ties. At one time the warm nights of Milltown were constantly pierced by the sound of trains. There were still several each night, but it wasn't the same. The mellow, beckoning call of the steam locomotive was gone, replaced by the blare of the diesel. In better days the

rail yard had been three times its present size and the terminal had bustled like one of today's airports. But in those days there was still a mill in Milltown and Harborside had had a working shipyard.

Each step Elmer took was more difficult than the last. His shoulder throbbed from supporting a hundred and seventy pounds of dead weight; and each time his right heel struck hard earth a bolt of pain ran the length of his spine.

"Wait for him at the top of the ridge, honey, just out of Harborside. You got no good place to hide once he's up on the path."

Lil was right. Straight ahead Elmer could see the roofs of Milltown outlined against the night sky. There was nothing along the sides of the path except for knee-high grass and weeds and some scattered brush.

As he labored under the burden of his victim, Elmer searched the darkness for the first track bed. Once he thought he heard a sound and turned awkwardly to look back toward the ridge. Nothing.

Again moving toward Milltown, he thought about himself and Lil. Which of them had first suggested killing Caleb? He found he couldn't remember. It just seemed that all at once the idea was there, and they were eagerly making plans for Caleb's departure and their own future.

"But who mentioned it first?" He frowned and shook his head. Remembering had become difficult lately.

Elmer had just made out the first set of tracks when something broke through the grass a few feet in front of him.

"Wha—?" The cry caught in his throat. His body jerked and his heart began to race as he fought to keep his balance. The corpse shifted perilously, and he heaved at it to resettle its weight. A small animal—a raccoon, from the shape—darted across the path.

"Damn. Do in old Caleb without a blink, then get scared by a crummy animal."

"Do in old Caleb without a blink." It hadn't been difficult, and it made Elmer recall the other time. Funny how even something like killing a man could go out of your mind, to come back only when another thought jerked it forward. It was in Iowa. Or was it Idaho? Elmer frowned. He remembered only that the 'bo who'd jumped him was big and mean and he wanted Elmer's new boots. But Elmer had gotten in a lucky kick, and a ham-sized rock took care of the rest. He'd stuffed the body into a culvert and hopped a freight and that was the end of it.

As Elmer neared the first pair of tracks the overlapping sounds of two

train whistles broke the night. North, out of the rail yards, two freights were on the move. One was some distance away, on one of the tracks nearest Milltown just leaving the yards. The other was much nearer, moving on the first track.

Elmer wished he'd been ready. He could have used the first track, and it would be done. Nothing to do now but get on to the third track.

The locomotive's headlight bore down on the path and Elmer realized he couldn't get his burden across the track without being seen. Yet standing there as the engine passed would be just as bad. He moved to the left off the path several feet into the grass. With a grunt he deposited the corpse full-length beside a scrawny brush and lay down beside it. He remained motionless until the clackety-clack of the last car's wheels died away and he could no longer feel the vibration through the ground.

It was all the more difficult for Elmer to shoulder the body a second time.

As he resumed the path and crossed the first set of tracks he wondered what had become of the thirty-odd years since he left Milltown, and wondered more what odd chance had brought him back to Lil. Lil had really been something thirty-five years ago—and, come to think of it; Elmer had been something himself. But Lil's father had hated him, and with her old man's constant hassling—usually about Elmer's scrapes with the law—they'd had to sneak around to see each other. And Lil's father always said it wouldn't have been right under any circumstances, with Elmer and Lil being first cousins.

Then the brawl in Harborside happened, and Elmer beat a young man into critical condition and had to leave town.

I'll be back, Lil, I promise. As soon as things cool off.

But he hadn't come back. Instead, each strange place led to another and the years filled up with freight trains, dirt jobs, hobo jungles, jails, flophouses, cheap booze, and jug wine.

Then three months ago he had rolled off a slow freight in the flat between Milltown and Harborside. He hadn't known where he was going until he was almost there. Milltown looked bad, but that was no surprise. Elmer was used to things that endured time and wear no better than himself.

Lil was there. And although Elmer had carried until that moment the image of the young and beautiful Lil he was completely accepting of the

changes in her. Her face was still pretty, but she was heavier—much heavier. Her hair, once richly brown, had gone to lackluster grey, and some missing teeth affected her speech. Elmer himself had grown heavy of limb and thick through the trunk like an aging bear, and he was bald. But he and Lil clicked again, just as they had in their youth.

Elmer was nearing the second pair of tracks. The corpse had shifted against his neck so he couldn't turn his head. His nostrils were assailed by the mixed odors of whiskey, sweat, and dirty clothes.

As he reached his right arm upward to encircle the body and ease its weight from his neck, his hand struck something hard in Caleb's clothing. It felt like a half-pint whiskey bottle.

"Never far from a drink, eh, Caleb?"

Elmer crossed the second set of tracks. "Next track, Caleb—then you'll have your accident."

What was that?

He thought he heard a voice—or, rather, voices—somewhere in the darkness ahead.

He heard the sound again. Definitely voices, and this time a faint laugh.

He held his breath and searched the night. At first he saw only the roofs of Milltown. Then a hemispheric outline broke above the lines and angles of the rooftops. This new silhouette disappeared only to bob up again accompanied by two more shapes. Three people were approaching on the path.

Elmer twisted his head from side to side as far as his burden would allow. There was noplacé to hide. His heart quickened as he searched the dark for a tree, a clump of brush, but he could see nothing but knee-high grass and weeds.

He stepped off the path to his right, parting the grass with his feet. A sharp masculine laugh came out of the darkness only yards away.

It cost Elmer much pain in his legs to kneel and lean to his right and ease the dead man to the ground; then, with caution, he stretched out beside him. But he let the ball bat slip from his hand. He fanned out his fingers and patted the ground for it.

"Hey, man, did you hear something?"

It was a vigorous voice, youthful.

"Ah, shoot, man, clean out your ears."

A third voice added, "Haw!"

“No, I heard something out there in the grass.”

“Animals is all over the place out here. I come nose-to-nose with a big old skunk along here one night.”

“Haw! Sweetest *you* ever smelled!”

Milltown kids, close by. Too close.

Elmer could hear shoes scuffing on the path and could even make out the raspy breathing of one of the trio.

Now it seemed the sounds were right beside him. He held his breath and tried to steel his body against the trembling that began between his shoulders. They must be passing within three or four feet of his head.

There was a heavy clunk and one of the voices said, “Damn!”

“What’s that, man?”

“Kicked something. Piece of wood or something else heavy.”

Grass rustled beside Elmer’s head and the footfalls stopped. Something scraped along the hardened earth of the path.

“Hey, this feels like—it is! A baseball bat! It feels like a good one, not splintered or anything—”

Elmer’s stomach became a sour knot.

“Got me a bat! Pow!”

The bat swished through still air and whipped at the tops of a few tall weeds over Elmer’s head.

Just as he thought he could hold his breath no longer, the footsteps resumed, continuing toward Harborside. His lips pressed against dry grass, Elmer exhaled into the ground. For fully five minutes he lay still. When at last he stirred he feared he wouldn’t have the strength to hoist his burden again. He was nearly right; it took him three tries to get the body into carrying position and where before he had plodded under the dead weight he now staggered.

It was only a matter of yards to the third set of tracks. Just a little longer. Step after painful step, but he was almost there. Then only a minute or two to arrange for Caleb’s accident, and he could head home to Lil.

He arrived at the tracks, deposited Caleb next to the path, and considered the next step in his and Lil’s plan. “Best get you off the path,” he murmured, “so’s you don’t get stepped on and found. Little to one side, like you just staggered and fell.”

He dragged Caleb three or four feet off one side of the path, then

across the first rail onto the tracks. He positioned the misshapen forehead over the second rail and, wincing, he slammed it against the rail.

After brushing himself off and surveying his work—Caleb lay prone, his head on one rail and his legs across the other—Elmer groped along the edge of the track bed until he found a fist-sized rock. He wedged the rock beneath the toe of one of Caleb's shoes.

Remembering the bottle in Caleb's pocket, he dug it out and placed it under Caleb's right hand. He would have liked a drink, but he couldn't bring himself to finish Caleb's bottle.

He stepped to the path and looked at Caleb. "All done, Lil, honey," he said. "Let's go home."

His step was lighter—a good hundred and seventy pounds lighter—as he started back across the flat toward Milltown—home to Lil, and to Caleb's three thousand dollars' worth of insurance, which would be payable to Lil.

The small boxy house was quiet as he entered through the kitchen. He took a cold beer from the refrigerator and drained it.

He found Lil asleep in the bedroom she had shared with Caleb. For a moment he regarded the snoring mound. The least she could have done was wait up for him.

He drank three more beers before he stripped off his clothes and rolled into bed beside her.

In his dreams Elmer once again carried Caleb along the dirt path. "Third or fourth track, honey, third or fourth track," Lil's words sounded again and again. "Here, I got you this nice new ball bat. Hit him on the head and put him on the third or fourth track." He trudged all night and Caleb got heavier and heavier, but each labored step brought him no closer to the third track. Caleb bounced against him and every now and then his dead face and cruelly distorted forehead twisted his way. His mouth was grinning at him.

Then there was the sound of crunching gravel. The track bed? Was he again arranging Caleb across the tracks?

Caleb and the tracks faded but the crunching continued. The walkway! There was someone on the walk in front of the house!

Elmer opened his eyes and reached across the bed. Lil was gone; the large hollow in the bed was cool.

The crunching stopped. There was the sound of feet shuffling on wood followed by the squeak of the front door and muffled voices.

He lay still, waiting for the heaviness to leave his aching limbs and hoping the pain behind his eyes would go away. He strained to hear words, but could catch nothing clearly. He could tell only that there were three people—two men and Lil. It was a few minutes before noon, nearly eleven hours since he'd swung the bat at Caleb.

"Well, let's get it over with," he murmured. He struggled from the bed and pulled on his dirty clothes.

When he entered the living room the conversation stopped and the three faces turned his way—a young uniformed deputy leaning against the front door with his arms folded, a large solid man in a wrinkled blue suit, and Lil. Lil's face was white and her eyes were compressed to puffy slits. Bless her—was that a real tear?

"Elmer," Lil said. "Caleb's dead. My man is dead." In the direction of the visitors Lil added, "This is my cousin, Elmer Brogan. He lives with us."

The man in the blue suit nodded. "I've seen you around, Mr. Brogan. I'm Sergeant Mills and this is Deputy Rossi." The deputy touched the brim of his hat.

"Dead?" said Elmer, his eyes wide. "Oh, no! What happened?"

Sergeant Mills said, "He was found this morning along the Harborside path." Mills looked from Elmer to Lil and back and added, "On one of the railroad tracks."

Lil managed a sob. Elmer simply moaned, "What happened? Was he drunk?"

"He drank a lot." Lil shook her head. "When I asked him to quit, he'd just get mad."

Elmer asked, "What arrangements do we have to make? I mean, to see he's properly—laid away?"

The sergeant raised his eyebrows in a fleeting skyward glance. Elmer caught the look; it struck him as out of place and it made him uneasy. He looked at Rossi. The deputy had altered his position only slightly; but now his holster was unsnapped and his hand rested near his gun.

"I wouldn't worry about arrangements if I were you," Mills said. "You're going to be busy for a while—" he looked from one to the other—"defending yourselves against a murder charge."

"You're crazy!" Elmer cried.

All their careful plans, all his hard work couldn't have been for nothing! "How cruel can you be?" Lil sobbed. "What are you trying to do?" She buried her face in her hands.

Mills was staring at Elmer. A hot, sick feeling spread through Elmer's chest, and it was with the greatest of effort that he said without expression, "A train makes a powerful mess of a person. I don't see how anyone could tell much after that."

"Ordinarily you'd be right," Mills said. "But we didn't have that problem. There hasn't been a train on that track in four days."

"Where did you find him? Which track?" Lil's question was a shrill demand.

"Neatly arranged on the fifth track—counting from here to Harbor-side," Mills said.

Lil's jaw began to tremble. "A lousy spur!" she cried. "The spur to the stone quarry. One train a week, if that!"

Elmer's mouth went slack. He shook his head slowly. "The third or fourth track, you said—"

"Fathead!" Lil yelled. "You damned drunken fathead!" Her voice rose to a scream and she leaped at him. "You counted from the wrong side!"

Mills pulled Lil away from Elmer, who didn't resist as Rossi moved in with the handcuffs. From out on the flat came the raucous horn of a diesel locomotive. As Elmer wondered where that engine might carry a man who was lucky enough to grab a passing car Mills began, "You have the right to remain silent . . ."

The July 16 Issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale June 19.

The killer left a ring of hats around his first victim . . .

THE HAWK SPOILS A BROTH



by

S.S. RAFFERTY

The gas jets in Dr. Amos Phipps's ground-floor study seemed eternally turned to a low flicker, giving visitors to the heavily draped room a funereal feeling. For Captain Fenley, as he eased into a seat opposite the desk, the spectral mood was heightened by the dark scowl on the doctor's face.

Normally a direct, confident man, Fenley became so uneasy under Phipps's glower that he accidentally let his billycock slide from his lap.

The hat hit the carpet with a resounding thud.

"I see you've joined the ranks of your fellow Metropolitan detectives in wearing an iron-lined derby," Phipps commented.

The remark was welcome to Fenley despite its aloof tone. When he had entered the house, tucked back from Thirteenth Street and known as Copley Mews, he had half expected the doctor to slam the door in his face. As a brevetted major in the Union Army he had faced gunfire unflinchingly, but Phipps's frosty demeanor made battlefield heroics pale by comparison with the present situation.

Fenley could sympathize with Phipps's rancor over the notoriety showered on the young doctor by the press after his solution to the Mad Hatter murders had brought the street stabber to bay. But, much as he sympathized, he felt the alienist was unjustly using him as a whipping boy. He kept his defensiveness to himself, however, because he needed Phipps's help once more.

"Well, you're looking fit, Doctor," he ventured—quite nonsensically. In the semi-darkness, it was impossible to appraise Phipps's physical health. "I trust all is well up at the College of Physicians and Surgeons." Discussing a man's occupation was always safe ground, Fenley reckoned. In this instance it was a horrendous mistake. Phipps exploded in a rage.

"I am no longer teaching at the college, Captain, thanks to *this!*" He tossed a garishly illustrated penny dreadful across the desk top.

Fenley took up the small book and shuddered at the cover illustration. The face on the cover bore a remarkable resemblance to the angular face of Amos Phipps in profile. Superimposed on the gaunt head was the shadow of a swooping bird of prey. "The Hawk of New York Strikes Back! Another Gripping Adventure of Dr. Ambrose Phillips!" it read.

Fenley riffled through the pages, picking out a sentence here and there. "Oh, dear," he sighed. "This is—well—dreadful. I'd say you have a lawsuit here, Doctor."

"Not according to the lawyers. It's a *roman à clef*, and judgment proof."

"Well, I'd horsewhip this author—Giacomo Heath."

"Horsewhip away, if you can find him. It's a pseudonym, and the publisher swears the manuscript came in unsolicited. You are in it too, by the by—as a Captain *Fitley*."

"And the college fired you over this?"

"In academia, one *resigns*, Captain—or is forced to."

"Well, at least you have a private practice to fall back on."

"I'm afraid New York is not going to beat down the doors of an alienist. Doctors of the psyche are a bit avant-garde."

Ever the tactician, the former Union cavalryman saw an opening, and he charged through it. "It's a shame, Doctor, but you know that your knowledge of human nature backed by scientific observation was being wasted on schoolboys. I'm sure the Commissioner would be willing to make some arrangement so that your talents would be put to public benefit."

"You have police surgeons."

"I'm thinking of a consulting situation, where you would receive a retainer and your skills would be drawn upon as needed. In that way, you could have money coming in while you build up your alienist trade."

"How fortuitous that you should turn up on the heels of my disaster. And probably with a case ready to hand."

"Certainly not planned, Doctor—but, I admit, fortuitous for me. I think I have another mad slayer on my hands."

"It's becoming quite the rage. Obviously Giacomo Heath's idealization of our talents doesn't dissuade them. What is the case?"

"Cases. Two. And they've been kept from the public scribes for a change. The first was the strangulation of a prostitute in her Five Points crib. Now that's no rarity in that low neighborhood, and it would have been treated routinely except for the odd clues."

"Which were?"

"Five men's hats—all brand new, all bought in different stores—that were left behind, circling the corpse."

Phipps's eyes went heavenward. "Hats again!"

"I'm afraid so. It's doubtful that five different customers would each leave a new hat behind at her place."

"You said *two* cases."

"The second is even more peculiar. Queenie Styles, an elderly washwoman, was strangled in her East River tub shop with the same type of red-satin cord as was found around the prostitute's neck."

"More hats found?"

"That would have made some macabre sense. No—this time the body was found floating in one of her large rinse tubs and—" he hesitated, as if begging to be believed—"in the tub were the makings for a soup—a ham bone, carrots, celery, onions, and a turnip. There is no connection between the two women except for the red cord, which I see as a sig-

nature. The rest is just madness.”

“A madman, perhaps, but not a fool. Of course, Queenie Styles ‘was a Negress.”

“Why, yes.” Fenley looked dumbfounded. “But you couldn’t possibly have known that. There’s been no announcement.”

“True, but it evolves from my hypothesis. Another scrap of clairvoyance: was the prostitute’s name Hattie, perchance?”

“Thunderation, it was! Hattie Clark! Hats left at Hattie’s corpse as a symbol or sign. But how the devil did you deduce that Queenie Styles was a Negress?”

“Do you play chess, Fenley?”

“Checkers exclusively. I’d make a poor chess player.”

“So do most writers of penny dreadfuls. Let me put the pieces together as I see them. First, the newspapers ballyhoo the Mad Hatter case beyond reason. Then this Giacomo Heath fans the flames with this ‘Hawk of New York’ nonsense.

“Now, somewhere out in this city—or, as Giacomo would have it, ‘this bubbling cauldron of heat, passion, and desire’—there is a deranged mind that takes umbrage with our fame. Dubious fame to us, but real to him. Thus he decides to challenge us in a game of murder.

“First he murders a fairly easy prey and keys his clues to the case that brought attention to me. He seems to have little respect for our powers of subtlety, and, thinking we will miss the significance in the victim’s name being Hattie, he accentuates the obvious by leaving five hats around her in a ring. He has tossed his hat into the ring of crime.”

Fenley grumped uneasily. “Seems a bit far-fetched.”

“Wait, I’m not through. In the second murder he is less imaginative. He could have used the hambone as the weapon itself. That would have shown some imagination, some subtlety. Perhaps garroting with red cords has a personal appeal that overpowers his creative senses. But he does show a flair for chess.”

“Chess? You see *chess* in all of this? Come now, Doctor, I think you’re handing me taffy. I am not here looking for sport, sir.”

“To be sure. But our killer is. Were the vegetables in the tub diced or simply cut in chunks?”

Fenley was getting to his feet, a look of irate disgust on his face.

“Please, Captain, I’m quite serious. You may have at least three more murders on your hands before long.”

Fenley sat down again with a glower. "I'll humor you for a few minutes before I have *you* hauled off to an alienist. The vegetables were in chunks."

"As I surmised. You're a married man, Captain—and, from your girth, I'd say the missus is a good cook. What would the same contents of the rinse tub—minus Queenie Styles, of course—tell you if you saw them in your wife's stove pot?"

"A soup, of course. But I still don't see—"

"Be more observant, Captain. *Chunk* vegetables."

"Oh, a broth then. She wouldn't waste time dicing vegetables that were going to be thrown out at the end of a long simmering."

"Precisely. A broth. And what spoils a broth?"

"Confound it, Phipps, I said a *few* minutes. All right—too many cooks spoil a broth."

"In a proverb, yes. In chess, only one is required. Now, now—hold your horses, sir. Chess strategists metaphorically see the construction of a perfect board problem as an unblemished 'broth.' Knowing that nothing is truly perfect in nature, the strategist challenges his opponent to find the 'cook' that will spoil his broth. It becomes a mania among experts to attack perfect games seeking the cook. Our killer has gone to great ends to get our attention. He has killed a black queen and left her in a broth. He has challenged us to a murder game, make no doubt of it. There will be three more murders and the last one will assuredly be mine."

"Three? If I were to accept this fanciful interpretation—and I don't—how do you know there will be five murders in all, yours included?"

"That, admittedly, is a guess. But if the killer bids us to find the cook, I can only assume he is obsessed with the Cywinski broth brewed back in 'fifty-seven, which still stands as a perfect chess maneuver despite fifteen years of robust and serious study. It's the current mania among chess players—to find the cook to undo Cywinski. It's a beautiful conception in which white mates with the queen's pawn in five brilliant moves. Our opponent has planned five murders and you'll have to forgive my sense of self in assuming that I am the opposing king in this game." Phipps leaned back in his chair. "You still look unconvinced, Captain. How would *you* explain the hats, the soup, and the ubiquitous red cord?"

"I can't. I had hoped you could give me an insight into the killer's mind."

"I've given it to you. He somehow resents this caricature of the master

sleuth that Heath has drawn and is out to make a fool of me. Since you have so carefully kept the cases out of the daily press, you have thwarted that goal. You can be assured that his next killing will be so sensational it will defy covering up."

"Do you really think one penny dreadful could cause that much venom in a twisted mind?"

"One *could*. But, as I understand it, this Giacomo Heath is a veritable writing machine. There are half a dozen Hawk books in print already, and probably more on the way, God help us."

"Have you read them all, Doctor?"

"I certainly have not! I read only ten pages or so in *that* one before seeking legal advice."

The policeman bent over, retrieved his billycock from the floor, and stood up. "That consultation offer still stands if you care to give these two cases your serious attention, Doctor."

"Implying that I haven't up to now? I assure you, Captain, my analysis has been most sober. Quite grave, considering I see myself as one of the future victims."

Fenley could see that Phipps was indeed in earnest, but in his own methodical mind, there was no house room for fancy frills—its furnishings were solid, bare-bone facts. But he could not dismiss Phipps's self-induced concern. "If it will make you feel safer, I can assign you a bodyguard."

Phipps got to his feet. "Thanks all the same, Captain, but I'm safe enough for the moment. You'd best look to the sensational murder which will bring the gamester the audience he needs."

"Do you have any predictions regarding it?"

"My first inclination is that the next victim will be prominent in society. That would insure instant notoriety. The question is, who? That's the person you should be guarding, Captain."

As Fenley strolled across Thirteenth Street toward Fifth Avenue, he found himself wondering if Phipps could be right. Nonsense, he told himself, that's the trouble with these intellectual fellows. They were long on rarified theories and short on dogged legwork. And legwork Fenley had done. The neighborhoods of both women had been combed for witnesses. The red-satin cords had been shown to hundreds of store clerks. Tub-shop customers had been questioned and requestioned, whores threatened with jail sentences in the hope of information—and nothing.

He had come to Phipps because he truly respected the young man's mind. But to play a game of death chess with a madman was hogwash!

He stopped by a news kiosk to pick up a later paper for the horsecar ride downtown and noticed a display of dreadfuls on the counter. He remembered Phipps saying that the Hawk stories included a Captain Fitley and, succumbing to a touch of vanity, he reached into his pocket for some coins.

"Land sakes, John Fenley, don't you get enough of lurid crime all day?" his wife said when he got home. "Those awful books are corrupting our youth!"

"A policeman has to stay up to date, Tessie."

"Well, don't throw them in *our* trash bin when you're through with them. I won't have the neighbors thinking *I'm* reading such stuff."

"Yes, Tess," he said obediently. Inwardly, he was amused. He knew his wife kept a secret copy of *What She Found Out—A Maiden's Trip to Albany* buried in the depths of her chemise drawer.

There were six thin volumes in the Hawk series and, being methodical, Fenley began with volume one, *The Hawk of New York*—the same one Phipps had in his office.

It was a fairly accurate depiction of the Mad Hatter case. The technical details were correct and, although Fenley certainly didn't talk in the high-toned language of his literary counterpart, Captain Fitley came off as an intelligent fellow and quite likeable.

Volume two was a letdown. The story, about a bank robbery, showed a fair knowledge of police procedure, bank operations, and the modus operandi of the average yegg, but the plot was totally unbelievable.

Volume three, *The Hawk Screams for Blood*, was just plain boring and totally contrived. But Fenley was not dissuaded from pressing on. After all, it was obvious the first story was patterned after a real crime and real people. The next two were products of the writer's imagination—and a rather listless imagination at that. The hero had taken on a herculean aspect.

As he got into volume four, *The Hawk Claws for Clues*, he found that Giacomo Heath had found his second wind. The writing was more robust, the characters realistic. Once the plot began to unfold, however, Fenley's brows furrowed in dark suspicion and he read on rapidly.

The story was about the theft of a valuable painting from a gallery in

broad daylight. The events and the clues bothered the real-life Captain all too uncomfortably. With only some minor rearrangement of facts, Giacomo Heath was writing about a crime case now open in the police files and, in keeping with the Commissioner's order, not mentioned to the press. The actual case concerned the theft of a rare gem from the Metropolitan Museum. It had been an embarrassment to the department, since five policemen had been assigned to guard the jewel. He raced through the book and when he reached the last page he put it down with a mutter. "I'll be damned," he said to himself, "that's how he did it. Of course—the porter!"

He checked the date of issue on the cover and found it to be four days after the actual crime. It could be coincidence, he reassured himself. But a brisk reading of volumes five and six obliterated any sense of conviction in the coincidence theory. Both plots involved current unsolved police cases that the Commissioner had cloaked in secrecy. The Commissioner had definite views about public information—solved cases were thrust on the press, unsolved cases were not mentioned, and woe to the policeman who breathed even a hint to a news reporter.

Yet this Giacomo Heath had not only written knowledgeably about these cases, he had solved them quite plausibly. He was writing as if the criminal had confessed to him.

Or as if he had committed the crimes himself.

Fenley was out of his chair, into his coat, and gone before Tess could ask where he was going at ten o'clock at night.

"I quite agree," Dr. Phipps said, closing the cover of the last Hawk book. Fenley had been amazed at the man's reading speed and depth of concentration. Habit, from digesting all those medical books, he supposed. "The first story about the Mad Hatter was mere reportage, and the cover date shows it to have been written well after the newspaper ballyhoo. The second and third are totally contrived. But the fourth, fifth, and sixth are written out of experience, not imagination. Heath created—or rather stole—the idea of a series character from the press, but when he tried to concoct a plot for his next two ventures they lacked juice, so he replaced imagination with action. He's your criminal in the last three cases—no doubt about it. And I believe he is also the author of your latest predicament."

"The strangulations? But—"

"Listen to me, Captain. In both the fifth and sixth books a nemesis is introduced called the Badger. That in itself is not rare, but if you noticed the author switched his allegiance from the Hawk, whom he lauded in the earlier work, to the master criminal. The flow of the syntax and the choice of adjectives indicate that he now hates the Hawk and takes pleasure in the Badger's ability to frustrate him."

"Yes, I saw that: But, still, the Hawk always wins."

"And the Badger eludes capture. Mostly through the ineptitude of Captain Fitley, I might add."

"Yes, Fitley is a proper ass in the last one. I guess he hates me too."

"No—he has lost respect for you. His hate is for Dr. Ambrose Phillips. That's why he plans to kill me."

Phipps opened volume six and turned to the last page. "Here is his challenge, from the note the Badger leaves in the gashouse where the Hawk narrowly escapes death: I quote.

"The conflict is joined, Hawk, and I shall prevail. The next time we take up the game you will be tortured by my doings and done in by my cleverness."

He closed the book, his face somber in the lamplight. Fenley stirred in his chair.

"I owe you an apology, Doctor, for having discounted your theory about a murder game. This Heath is deranged, of course. But what have you done that causes this horrible resentment?"

"Probably nothing. He merely borrowed my persona in the beginning. Writers initially tend to see themselves as the hero of the piece but, unlike the discipline of painting, where form and the limited spectrum of color control the imagination, or music, with its mathematical exactitude demanding logic, an author can get lost. All the poor devil has is his own mind—a pitifully poor weapon in the war between what is and what might be."

"Poor devil? The man's a killer!"

"Precisely, Captain. He kills in print and loses perspective. So now he kills in reality. Have you not wanted at any time to kill someone?"

"Having *had* to do so, in the war and in the line of duty as a policeman, I can categorically say no. I had to but I never wanted to."

"A thin distinction, I can assure you. We kill in the mind before we do in the flesh."

"That's mighty interesting, Doctor, but I have two murders on my

hands and, by your thinking, three more in the offing. I've got to put the twisters on this scoundrel."

"Pragmatism will out," Phipps said. "Well, first we have a framework of Giacomo Heath's mind. He will strike sensationally, to be sure. Now he has evoked the chess metaphor, so let's deal with it. How many bishops are there in the city?"

"Bishops? Oh—church bishops! Well, there's the R.C. fella at St. Patrick's and, of course, the venerable prelate visiting at St. Paul's. Heaven help us, are you suggesting—?"

"Yes, I am. Tell me, are there any members of the English peerage visiting here?"

"Probably half a dozen, the way the quality marry off their daughters these days."

"Then you had best set up a protection plan for them."

Fenley was sweating under his stiff collar. Visions of red-satin cords coiled ominously in his brain. "All right, it will be done—but I'm going to look like a damned fool at headquarters."

"You already are, in Giacomo Heath's writings."

"So I am, so I am."

"And so am I. Shall we nab him?"

"When we do I'm going to wring his neck before the hangman gets to him."

"Now, my dear Captain, *you* sound like an author," Phipps said. He picked up one of the volumes. "You realize, Captain, that a clue to Heath's identity lies in the pages of all of these books. Most writers at least try to achieve a style, but there seems to be no such intention anywhere in these."

"I thought we were concerned with finding a killer," Fenley said, annoyed.

"My, my, Captain, such anti-intellectualism. Initially you rejected the chess theory, which was deduced with ratiocination, and now you dismiss a possible lead through examination of Heath's work."

"All right, so the man's a hack. There must be hundreds of them around. What does it prove?"

"Oh, I haven't accused him of hackdom. His choice and use of words is quite correct despite his flights into the lurid. Hacks generally tend to be too careless with the language, which is their ruin."

"The man will be the ruin of us both if we don't get some sleep,"

Fenley said, stifling a yawn and standing. "Thank you, Doctor, for admitting me at such a late hour."

The next morning, Fenley was roused at dawn and rushed to the Fifth Avenue Theater where the famed curvaceous form of Letitia Castle had been found hanging from a gas pipe on a red-satin cord in her dressing room. From the actress's left foot hung a dead crow. He immediately dispatched a police carriage to fetch Phipps.

"Not a pretty sight, is it, Doctor? She was such a beautiful woman."

"I'm not disgusted by the sight of death, Captain. I'm disgusted with myself. The man's a maniacal genius."

"I know a castle is a chess piece, but I don't understand the dead bird at all."

"Damnation!" Phipps pounded the wall with his fist. It was a side of the man Fenley had never seen before. So the aloof doctor had a temper after all.

"Here I have them guarding bishops and knights. I hadn't calculated that he would take my rook on the king's side to prevent my castling. I thought he would go for a capital piece such as the knight or the bishop, but he has done more than murder a Castle. He has affixed a crow to her foot. A rook is hard to come by in this country, so he used its nearest local relative—a crow. More significantly, he tied the dead bird to her left foot, the black king's side, which prevents me from castling, or protecting my king, in the soundest way."

Fenley listened intently and discounted half of what the doctor was saying. The fact that a famous Castle had been murdered with a red cord was enough for him. "You were so cocksure about bishops and knights. How did you overlook a Castle?"

"Because I was taking Heath literally. Now I see he is using a chess game only metaphorically. It should have been clear to me when he took a *queen* on his second move. Yes—" Phipps stared at the corpse "—I am closer to him now."

Suddenly the noise of a commotion broke out in the hallway. When Fenley opened the dressing-room door he found two patrolmen desperately trying to hold back a horde of clamoring men. A photographer's flash platform flamed in the captain's face, momentarily blinding him. He retreated back into the dressing room and shut the door against an angry cacophony of protest. "The press," he said dejectedly.

"As I predicted. There's no covering this one up, Captain."

"I know, I know. I only hope they don't find out about the others too."

"It might be prudent to tell them everything, but I know you don't have the authority. Well, perhaps we can turn this to our advantage with a little maneuver."

And in they came, fifteen jaunty examples of New York's fourth estate—plaid-suited, derbies pushed back on their heads, all shouting questions at once.

"How about it, Captain? Murder or suicide?" Morgan of the *Sentinel* bellowed over the others.

"What's the Hawk doing here, Captain?" cried Fingler of the *Chronicle*.

"What's the *crow* doing here is what I want to know," Moore of the *Courier* demanded.

"One at a time." Fenley looked beseechingly at Phipps, who spoke up calmly.

"Gentlemen, Miss Castle was strangled before she was hung from the gas pipe—I think the coroner will agree to that. So we have murder here. It's obviously the act of a madman—or woman."

"Woman?" a voice shouted.

"It can't be discounted, gentlemen," Phipps went on. "Miss Castle was a collector of male admirers and she may have inspired hatred in some wife or rival."

"I still want to know how the bird figures in," the man from the *Courier* said.

"Well, I suspect it would be difficult to find an albatross in these parts. The mind seeks its own symbols that are meaningless to others."

And so Phipps continued, to Fenley's utter dismay.

After the reporters had left, he turned to Phipps. "You certainly gave them a bushel full of fancies, Doctor."

"It will keep them occupied."

"That's quite a maneuver—a deception that would have put old Robert E. Lee to shame."

"Yes, but many of that General's feints turned out to be direct attacks. He knew how to use his pawns, so to speak. We shall see how we have fared."

But Fenley had not the luxury of a look-and-see position. He had to act quickly and effectively in the only manner he knew—dogged investigation.

The reluctantly dying sun pushed a pale shadow across Park Row and crept into the windows of the Fabulation Press editorial offices. Fenley decidedly disliked Giles Cutler. Corpulent, extravagantly mannered, a predatory toff in a pearl-grey suit with black piping, canary-yellow vest, stunning cravat, and, worst of all to Fenley—who was sitting across the desk from the jaunty publisher—a tiny diamond ring on a chubby pinky.

"Pray, Captain, we disdain the term penny dreadful. After all, sir, they do cost a *dime*."

The reference to "we" was royal, Fenley assumed, since the office was barren except for Cutler's desk and an old table in the corner. The table was piled high with stacks of foolscap, which whetted the policeman's appetite. He was getting no sustenance at all from Cutler himself.

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Cutler. At a dime a copy, this Hawk stuff must bring a brisk profit."

"Stuff? Please, Captain, some respect. Dickens, Thackeray, Shakespeare, Giacomo Heath. *Stuff?*"

And so it went from the opening minutes—Fenley thrusting, Cutler parrying. When Fenley asked how this anonymous writer was paid, he was shown a letter of authorization, conveniently at hand in Cutler's desk drawer, stating that all royalties were to be placed in escrow for Heath until called for. "He must be a very trusting fellow," Fenley said.

And there the interview turned sour. Giles Cutler puffed his cheeks, looked at his diamond ring as a woman would a mirror, and said testily, "Impeccability is the soul of publishing, sir, as it is of motherhood."

In his mind, Fenley had trouble with the analogy—he had seen too many abandoned and abused children perhaps.

"Now, sir," Cutler asked magisterially, "what brings a policeman to my door besides an interest in publishing? I'm a busy man."

This would be tricky. Fenley didn't want to tip his hand in his suspicion of Heath, but he desperately needed a clue to his identity.

"The truth of the matter is, Mr. Cutler, that I *am* interested in publishing—or writing, rather. I figure after twenty years on the force I have some grand stories to tell. My trouble is getting started. I thought if I could talk to a writer like Heath I could pick up some pointers."

"Oh, you sly fellow." Cutler wagged a chubby finger in mock chastisement. "And here I thought you were here to complain about the Captain Fitley *roman à clef*."

Fenley relaxed a little. He had hoped that was what Cutler would think.

"It's quite legal, you know," the publisher went on. "Even if I knew how to put you in touch with Heath I doubt if he would see you. Writers are very guarded about their works in progress." Unconsciously he nodded his head in the direction of the foolscap-laden table and Fenley marked it well.

Cutler started to speak again when the hall door opened and a spare, grey-haired man shuffled into the room. He was neatly though shabbily dressed. Cutler snapped at the man as if Fenley weren't present. "Damnation, Tobin, ten minutes for lunch? The new chapters are on the table and I'll expect them to be ready in the morning."

"Yes, sir," the man said subserviently. "They'll be done." He went to the table, picked up a pile of papers, and went off to another room.

"God deliver us from copy editors," Cutler groaned. "Well, Captain, the best way to get the hang of writing is to write. Put down some ideas and bring them around to me. I'll give you some sound advice: write about things you know and have done, otherwise it will sound false."

With forced joviality, Fenley said, "Well, on the other hand, I certainly hope this Heath of yours is just using his imagination."

The lamplighters were torching the street lamps along Park Row as Fenley took his post in a doorway opposite the Fabulation Press Building. Although he could have assigned junior detectives to the task of tracking Cutler's movements, he didn't feel he could order them to commit a breaking and entry, which, now that it was dark, would make it a burglary. The question was how long he would have to wait before Cutler and Tobin left the building. Certainly no judge was going to issue a search warrant on the fantasy Phipps had spun.

As he watched the building, a voice from down the sidewalk startled him. "Well, well, Captain—looking for your madwoman killer down here?"

It was Moore, the reporter from the *Courier*. "You know, if I hadn't had direct quotes on what Phipps said my editor would have canned me good and proper."

"He said it was a theory. We're investigating all aspects."

Moore laughed. "Albatrosses for crows, by golly. I think Phipps ought to have his bumps read."

It was bad luck running into Moore, of all people. Fenley's dislike for him was compounded by the fact that he had been a Copperhead during the war and still wore the Indian-head penny in his lapel. To Fenley, the anti-war democrats had struck their lowest blow when they worked against Lincoln's reelection in '64.

And, if Moore's appearance wasn't bad luck enough, here was a closed hack pulling up to the curb in front of the Fabulation Press doorway and Cutler himself stepping into it. Fenley could see a very attractive woman waiting for him in the cab. All he could do now was note the commercial license number on the hack's door.

Moore babbled on, but Fenley ignored him, for now Tobin, the copy editor, emerged from the building, turned left, and started down the street. Fenley's original plan had been to search the vacant editorial offices, but Tobin had suddenly become a curiosity. The shuffling, stoop-shouldered editor had changed from a tired clerk to an erect, striding sergeant-major or cavalryman on leave.

"See you around, Moore," Fenley said, brushing past him.

"Hey, Captain," the reporter called after him jeeringly, "what I want to know is why the crow wasn't hanging around the Castle woman's neck!"

"Ask Dr. Phipps," the policeman replied over his shoulder, and proceeded after his quarry.

He pursued Tobin at a quick pace down the block and across another until he entered a grey two-story building bearing a weatherbeaten sign—ominous and yet encouraging—GOTHAM CHESS CLUB. Then Fenley returned to the Fabulation Press office.

The outer door clicked open with the second skeleton key in Fenley's collection. His search of the inner workroom was quick, professionally thorough, and fruitful.

There it was: *The Badger's Revenge*, the full story up to the death of Queenie Styles, the washerwoman. More importantly, the manuscript had been typed on one of the newfangled typewriting machines that were becoming so popular.

Fenley was jubilant. It shouldn't be too difficult to determine who in New York owned a typewriter. There couldn't be that many.

To his surprise, it all fell into place through an unrelated, routine investigation. Burdened with the bulk of the case, he had assigned a plainclothesman named Moran to check on the hack who had picked up

Cutler and find out where he had delivered the publisher and his handsome lady friend.

"You're absolutely sure of this, Moran?" the Captain said, trying desperately to keep his amazement under control.

"Yes, sir," Moran responded. "One-fourteen Chambers Street. One of them bluestockings, if you know what I mean—but quite a looker, for all of that. Now I'm not trying to act like a weissenheimer, but a woman who runs a commercial business! What's next?"

"And her name is *Tobin*? You're sure of that?"

"Yes, sir. She runs one of those new typewriting services—legal papers, manuscripts, and the like. She'll never make a go of it, Captain. There's no replacing a clerk's fine script for my money."

"So that's it," Fenley muttered. "They're all in it together."

His first impulse was to bring them in for questioning, but his instinct told him to clear it with the Commissioner, who wouldn't be available until morning. Well, Fenley thought, time enough to put it all into a concise report explaining the entire cabal—and hope fervently that they wouldn't kill anyone before then.

When Fenley entered the Commissioner's office at eight the next morning he was stunned to find not only the District Attorney but the Mayor himself.

"Fenley," the Commissioner shouted angrily, waving several newspapers at him, "what in blue blazes is this Phipps up to?"

Fenley had come directly from home and had seen no papers. As he scanned the news stories he could see he had wasted his time writing out the intricacies of the chess murder theory. Phipps had released the details to every paper in town.

HAWK REVEALS CHESS MURDERS
CASTLE DEATH ONE OF SEVERAL, SAYS HAWK.
HAWK VOWS CHECKMATE TO KILLER!

The police captain went limp at the betrayal. "I can't explain Dr. Phipps's actions, sir, but he doesn't have all the facts. I have pinpointed the killers. It's here in my report."

"Report!" the Mayor roared. "Thunderation, Fenley, this Hawk has made asses of the Department and of my Administration. Chess murders,

indeed! He'll have some explaining to do, I can tell you!"

"He'll be here shortly, Your Honor," the Commissioner said. "I've sent a sergeant to bring him in—under arrest, if necessary."

The only calm person in the office had been the District Attorney, well noted for his cold, calculated demeanor in the courtroom. He now broke his silence, stroking his luxuriant beard.

"Do you concur with Dr. Phipps's analysis, Captain?"

"I think he's got a little too much frosting on it, sir. But, in the main, yes."

"You honestly see the doctrine of similar transactions at work between the deaths of a laundress, a whore, and a noted actress?"

"Strangulation by a red cord is enough to satisfy the law, sir."

"I'll be the judge of what's the law and what isn't, Captain."

"Transactions—what's all this about transactions?" asked the Mayor, putatively an attorney himself.

"The element that ties one crime to another—the perpetrator's signature. Now, red cords are quite common, Captain, and chess-playing killers are a—"

The District Attorney was interrupted by a clerk who entered sheepishly and handed the Commissioner a note.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Is Sergeant Hickey here?" The clerk nodded. "Well, bring him in. This is terrible, terrible!"

Hickey was a burly plainclothesman with a gruff voice and a nervous manner. "Yes, sir," he said. "He's dead all right—and not a nice way to go."

"Who's dead?" the Mayor demanded.

"Dr. Phipps, sir. I went on orders to fetch him and found him dead in his front-room study, shot in the chest with an arrow. Yes, gentlemen, I was as surprised as you all look right now. He must have been shot from outside the window." He glanced warily around the office. "I left things as they were and put a uniformed man on post and came in to report."

"The damned fool seems to have brought it on himself," the Mayor said. "Shooting his mouth off that he was about to nab a killer."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Fenley said somberly, "I think I'd best get over there."

The Commissioner stole a glance at the Mayor, who nodded. "By all means, Fenley. He was a friend of yours, wasn't he? I'm sorry."

As Fenley was leaving the room, the D.A. said, "I guess this turns Phipps's chess idea into garbage, doesn't it, Captain?"

"Not necessarily, sir."

"Come, man! I know of no archers in chess. And the similar transaction fails as well—nothing has been said of a red cord."

On arriving at the house on Thirteenth Street, Fenley told the uniformed man to wait outside and entered the murder scene alone. Seeing Phipps lying on his back near the window with an arrow jutting from his chest, he had all he could do to remain professional. He quickly noted details of the room's appearance before venturing toward the body.

But his coolness gave way when he knelt down to examine the alienist. In a low, quaking voice he said, "I'll get him, Phipps. I'll make him pay."

"That we will, old fellow," the corpse said, sitting up with a smile. "Thank God you finally showed up. I'm getting as stiff as any case of rigor lying here."

"Come now," Phipps said, unbuttoning his shirt and pulling out a small board through which the arrow had been driven home, "something had to be done and I did it. Thank God that plainclothesman didn't take a closer look."

"I think I deserve an explanation, Doctor," Fenley said, regaining his composure.

"To be sure, my friend. It became obvious after Miss Castle's murder that the killer's hand had to be forced, and that's what I have done."

Fenley told him his ruse had been a waste of time, and gave the doctor the details of his investigation into the cabal.

"Interesting," Phipps said, walking about the room and unlimbering his body, "but hardly conclusive. One of them might be involved perhaps—but not all three. There's a mad mind at the bottom of this, and madmen work alone. Bear with me, Captain. I am turning the tables on our chess player." He sat. "Appropriately, in chess, it's called 'the king takes a walk,' but he can only escape by moving one square at a time. I have done so dramatically. I have robbed him of the symmetry of his game plan—the sick mind can be canny and clever, but not when it's frustrated and enraged. To the killer, my 'murder' has robbed him of his glory, his satisfaction. Now he has one of two alternatives. Kill my killer—or find a substitute king."

"God help us, there must be three hundred people named King in the city."

"No, no, my dear Captain, there is only one substitute—you. Fenley, you are about to be murdered. And, if I guess correctly, it will be with a bow and arrow. Then, and only then, will he be satisfied."

The "funeral" was two days later. Fenley had dutifully announced to the press that he would avenge his fallen friend, and at the cemetery there were throngs of people held back ten yards from the grave site by a police cordon. Throughout the crowd were teams of plainclothesmen, several of whom were keeping an eye on Tobin. His wife and Cutler were not in attendance. On the knolls and woods about the cemetery other police agents covered the area with field glasses.

Fenley gave the eulogy. As he reached his crescendo, a whirl broke the air and he fell in a heap by the coffin with an arrow in his back.

Over the screams of the crowd the shrill blasts of a police whistle sounded and Fenley got to his feet.

"Got him?" he shouted through his cupped hands.

"Aye, aye," a long call came from a hill.

Half an hour later, Fenley burst triumphantly into Phipps's rooms, still stiff from the wooden corset he had worn for most of the day, but jubilant just the same.

"We got him!" he announced to the doctor, who was reading a book at his desk.

"I would assume so. Oh, here, before you go on—" he handed the policeman an envelope—"I've indulged myself in a bit of a game."

Fenley opened the envelope and read the slip of paper contained within.

"Well, I'll be damned. You knew it was Moore, the reporter, all the time? Why didn't you just say so?"

"Again, it was merely an assumption. Sit down, Captain, and pour yourself some port. I knew the person who wrote as Giacomo Heath was probably a newspaperman. I didn't know just who, but, come to think of it, the pen name 'Heath' should have given us a clue. A heath is a moor, is it not?"

"I still don't see—"

"You could have. Recall my observation that Heath's writing showed

a marked absence of style, yet the syntax and grammar were correct. What type of writer would have no need to develop a style? A reporter, of course, who simply puts down one fact after another. His job is to inform, not to entertain. Then we have the lack of plotting in volumes two and three. Again, the newspaperman does not invent action and circumstance. He merely observes and records it. Thus we have the other volumes' reliance on actual crimes to give them substance. Just where his mind snapped I can't say—but it did, and he fixed on this chess idea."

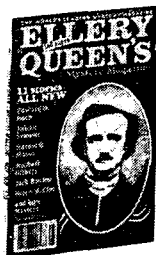
"Well, you certainly spoiled his broth, as you call it. And that ends the penny dreadfuls about us."

"No, there you are wrong, my friend," Phipps said wryly. "I assure you that Cutler and the Fabulation Press will capitalize on us all the more now. Cheers, Captain Fitley!" He lifted his wine glass.

John Fenley lifted his own glass. "Cheers, Mr. Hawk!" he returned with a glimmer.

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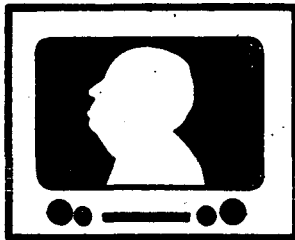
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CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

Like many of Graham Greene's heroes, Maurice Castle is a methodical, rather ordinary man, one we might even call colorless. We watch him plan the routines of uneventful days. We see him at home sharing simple pleasures with his wife and adopted son. We fret at the droning boredom of his civil-service job, while he thrives on it. But he is with British Intelligence, a none-too-important part of England's espionage network, and, as we soon learn in horror, has been across several years quietly slipping information to Russia. And now this security leak has been discovered; and the "old boys" of "the firm" are looking sternly about, trying to uncover the source of the flow and stop it. This is the plot of Graham Greene's latest novel, *The Human Factor*, which has been made into a fascinating, surgically incisive spy film by Otto Preminger, his best film in many years.

Nicol Williamson portrays the quiet traitor with great skill; he was also, you will recall, the tortured, weeping Sherlock Holmes of *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*. Surrounding him at London Security HQ are Richard Attenborough, John Gielgud, and Robert Morley—all quite perturbed at a leak of actually somewhat unimportant information traced to their coding substation. Soon the humdrum office seethes with intrigue. The traitor must be "eliminated," without fuss, even though the procedure is distasteful to some. Williamson, so dull a man, is only momentarily suspected; a flamboyant bachelor (Derek Jacobi) in the same department is fingered as the double agent and routinely killed with a poison injection.

He dies, everyone thinks, of "a cold." But Williamson knows that soon he may have to leave his country and family and take flight.

The realities of the Philby and Blunt spy cases have made the actions of the people in *The Human Factor* quite believable. We certainly understand the reasons why Williamson brings himself to betrayal, for the film probes as deeply into his soul as does any Greene novel. The adaptation by Tom Stoppard (*Travesties, Night and Day*) is brilliantly faithful to the mood of the book. And Preminger, despite all his flashy projects of recent years, is true to Greene's somber greys as well. In fact, the film unfolds more like a novel, as we eavesdrop on a life being lived: short, sparse exchanges detailing the human factors which propel a decent, troubled man into a string of betrayals and tragedy.

"Graham Greene is an old friend of mine," says Preminger. "I have been in constant touch with him since he wrote the screenplay for my first British film, *Saint Joan*, in 1956. I admire him greatly. He is a superior, intelligent man." Both the director and the author have individually made significant contributions to the genre, and Greene's "entertainments" have translated well to the mystery screen. *Orient Express* (1934) with Norman Foster was the first, at ease with the melodrama atmosphere clinging to that famous train. W.R. Burnett worked on the screenplay for Greene's *This Gun for Hire* (1942), changing the locale from London to Los Angeles and providing Alan Ladd a memorable starring role as the assassin-for-pay. (Interestingly, James Cagney himself directed the 1957 remake, *Short Cut to Hell*.) *The Ministry of Fear* (1944), in which a dazed Ray Milland stumbles onto an exotic spy ring by winning a cake at a charity bazaar, was brilliantly directed by Fritz Lang. Charles Boyer, Lauren Bacall, and Peter Lorre contributed to the bleak moodiness of *The Confidential Agent* in 1945.

While the above films were all Hollywood-made, the postwar British film industry did not ignore Greene. Michael Redgrave played a young sailor involved with smugglers in *The Man Within* (1947) while Richard Attenborough was a teenage petty crook at a seaside resort in *Brighton Rock* the same year. Greene himself wrote the screenplay for *The Fallen Idol* (1948), in which a child's attempts to protect the butler (Ralph Richardson) he hero-worships from a murder charge gets the man into further trouble. He then wrote *The Third Man* directly for the screen—a masterpiece set in postwar black-market Vienna (1949). Later films—*The Heart of the Matter*, *The Stranger's Hand*, *The End of the Affair*, *Across*

the Bridge—all deal in some fashion with crime as they explore the murky darkensses of the human heart.

Starting with the release of *The Quiet American* (1958)—a tale of terrorism and espionage in Saigon somewhat altered from Greene's book—American film companies again took heavy interest in the novelist. *Our Man in Havana* (1959), actually filmed in Cuba, has a bumbling vacuum-cleaner salesman (Alec Guinness) doubling as a spy, sending fanciful, untrue reports to his superiors—reports they in turn take *very* seriously. *The Comedians* (1967) is set in Haiti, Greene once again probing the ferment of a troubled country. He did the screenplays for both films. Meanwhile, Harry Lime—the unrepentant black rogue of *The Third Man*—was resurrected and laundered into a crafty but good-hearted globe-trotting adventurer in a radio series, again played by Orson Welles, and by Michael Rennie on television. *Travels with My Aunt* (1972) is surprisingly light-hearted Greene, with Maggie Smith delightful as a flamboyant, aging con artist. *England Made Me* (1973) has Michael York witness to—and even participant in—the downfall of a ruthless financier (Peter Finch) against a setting of prewar Germany, although in Greene's book it was Stockholm.

Like Greene, Otto Preminger is at home in several genres, but has contributed at least one landmark movie mystery. An Austrian director who emigrated to this country in the late '30s, he both directed and played the victim in *Margin for Error* (1943), a comedy whodunit dealing with murder at the German consulate written by Clare Booth Luce. The following year he brought Vera Caspary's *Laura* to the screen, a legendary suspense masterpiece of incredible mood in which a detective falls in love with the persona of a dead girl and is stirred from the depths of his moroseness when, on a rainy night halfway through the film, she turns up alive. That scene has few equals. *Fallen Angel* in 1946, though neglected, is almost as good: both a drifter and the murder of a waitress disturb the tranquility of a small town.

Preminger was to return often to the mystery form. In *Whirlpool* (1950) a hypnotist uses his skill to create an alibi for murder. *The Thirteenth Letter* (1951), adapted from an earlier French film, is a bizarre account of how an unknown poison-pen writer nearly destroys a small village; this too is a film to seek out. *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1956) was for its day a brutally realistic portrait of a drug addict sinking into a criminal underworld. *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) was a gripping courtroom

drama, and there is both blackmail and intrigue to be found in the Washington of *Advise and Consent* (1962). In *Bunny Lake Is Missing* (1965) Preminger tried somewhat less successfully to return to the *film noir* mood of *Laura*, but this odd little story of a woman's search throughout London for her allegedly vanished child—there is some doubt in the mind of Scotland Yard detective Laurence Olivier that the child actually exists—has such eerie, nervous intensity that it is compelling.

Now, for the first time, Otto Preminger tackles espionage, and espionage by Graham Greene at that. His treatment of a very introspective book is so lucid and perceptive, so unsensational, so evocative of the writer (Greene's boyhood town, Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire, was used in the film, as it was in the novel), that it is the truest and best Greene film in some time—although quite without splash. *The Human Factor* is a worthy collaboration.



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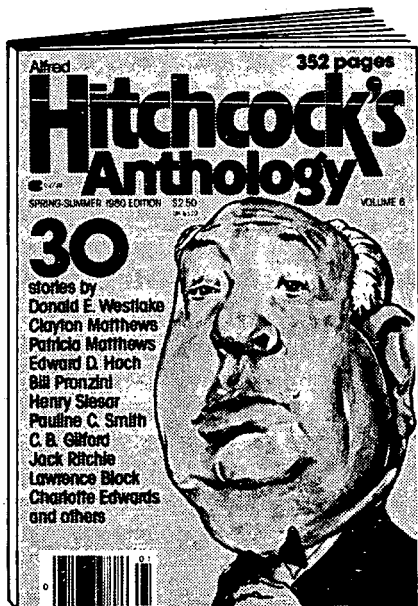
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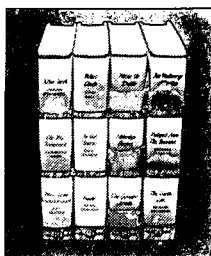
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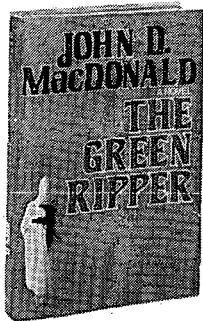
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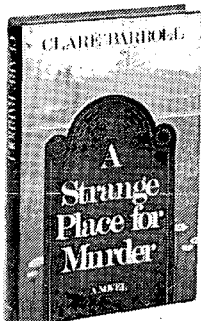
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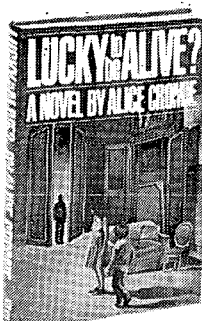
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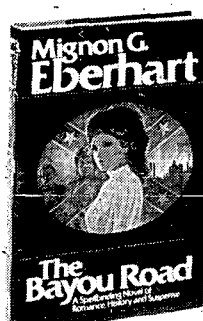
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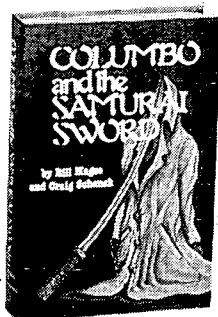
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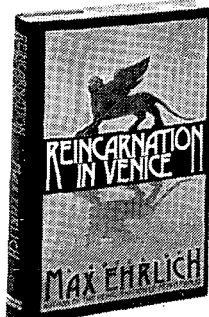
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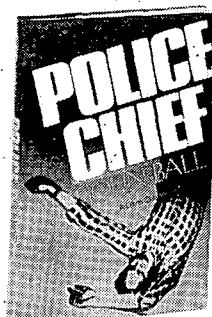
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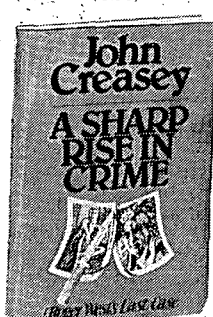
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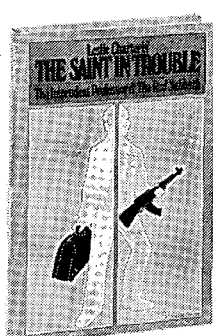
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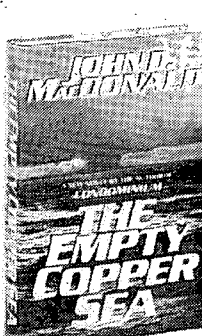
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